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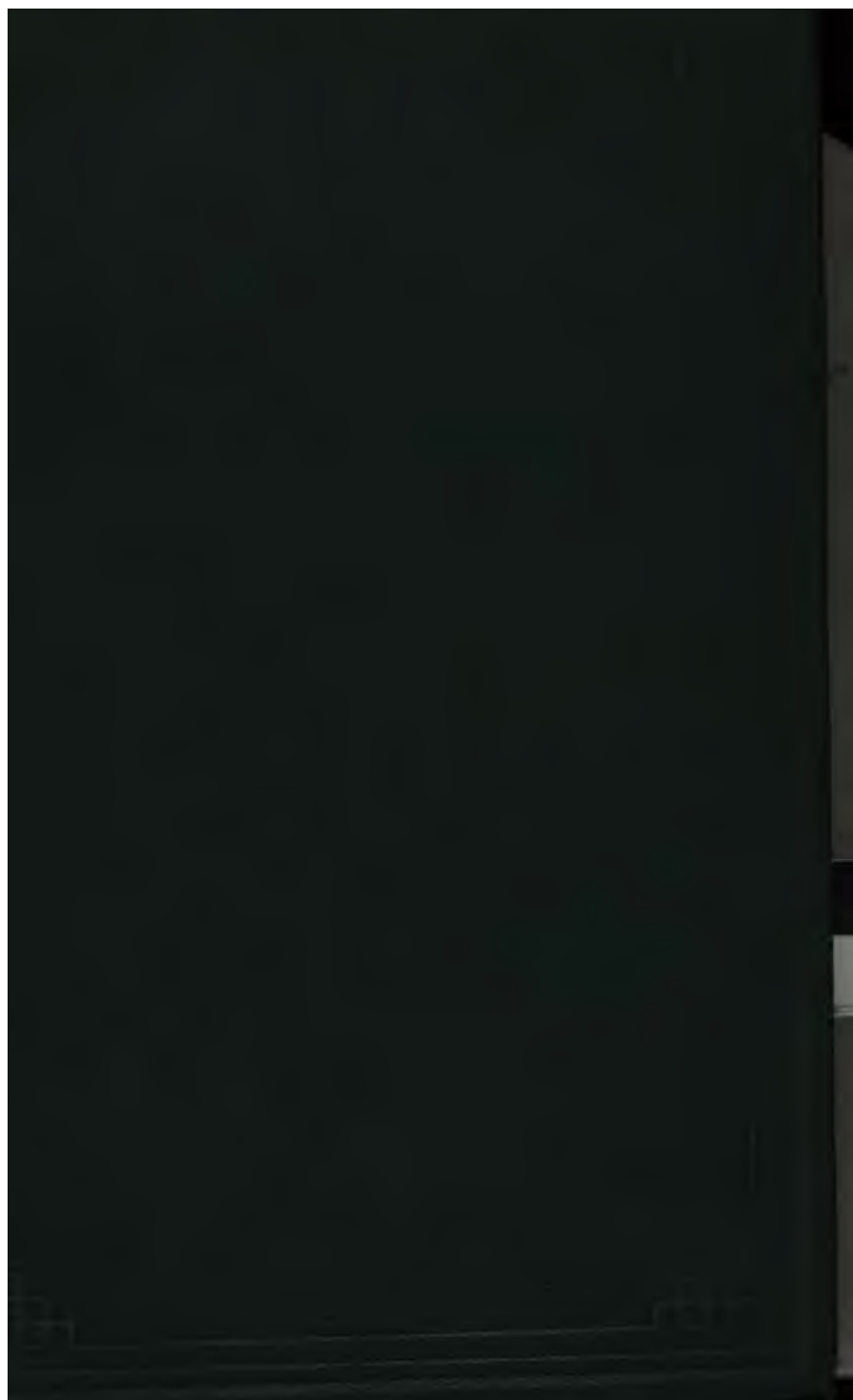
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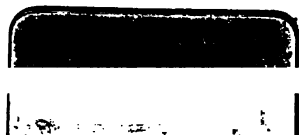
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# DENIS DONNE.

A NOVEL.

BY

A. THOMAS,

AUTHOR OF "SIR VICTOR'S CHOICE."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# DENIS DONNE.

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## CHAPTER I.

STEPHANIE DOES AS SHE WOULD BE DONE BY.

“You needn’t drive fast,” Miss Fordyce said to the coachman when she was stepping into her mother’s brougham that night, after the long conversation with her Aunt Ellen relative to her cousins and their matrimonial arrangements and prospects, “or you can go home by Old Brompton lane.”

The fact was, that Stephanie wanted to have a time of uninterrupted thought to herself, before she canvassed the events of



the day with her mother. She wanted to fairly balance all the fors and againsts Miss Conway that she had heard, unbiassed by suppositions and suggestions from her mamma, who was rather given to supposing and suggesting things until they looked facts and realities. Stephanie had always from a child had great, wide notions of justice. She was very much given to waiting to hear the other side, and she was also very much given to remembering that there are degrees in iniquity.

The latter truth had become impressed upon her mind in very early childhood. She had been had down to stay for a few weeks with her cousins the Cornwells in order that her Aunt Selina might take the pattern of her London-made clothes for her own little daughters, and that an attachment might spring up between herself and the eldest son of the house. While she was there, a lady had levanted with her

husband's cousin and all the plate and ready money that was in the house, and Connie had broken an ormolu vase, and Mrs Cornwell had applied precisely the same words of rebuke and condemnation to both offences.

So now, though she shared her Aunt Ellen's firm belief that Miss Conway had not suffered the aunt of the house of Allondale to be incarcerated under a mistake, she did not deem that the malicious exploit cancelled the obligation that was upon Lord Allondale to treat with all befitting respect the woman whom he was going to marry. Stephanie had told Denis Donne that it had "set her against the marriage far more than before," and she meant it. But, at the same time, she felt that her antipathies ought not to be consulted in such a case, and she declared to herself as she was driving home, that though a girl remained quiescent when the

unknown and antagonistic aunt of the man she was engaged to was being insulted, she might, for all that, be a very good, faithful, affectionate wife to the man. The offence in her eyes was a great one, for she had been nurtured in the belief of the magnitude of her Aunt Ellen's claims to consideration. But she had broad notions of justice, and she remembered that respect, like family affection, is entirely a matter of training and education. She remembered this, and that Miss Conway had not been thus trained and educated, and she saw that, though Aunt Ellen regarded it as a capital offence, it was in reality but the breaking of an ormolu vase.

In her own heart she knew that she had conceived a bad impression of Miss Conway, but then she told herself that her impressions must not be suffered to weigh against the very real and tangible claim there was upon her cousin to do that which

it behoved a gentleman to do. She felt painfully that the men of her house were weaker than its women. "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel," might be said with truth of them all; and she detested this sight of the female members making the waters of the life of the descendant of men who had known and shown how to hold their own, flow in whatever direction they pleased. If, of his own free will, and from some inner conviction, Lord Allondale would break off this engagement firmly and honourably, no one would be more delighted at it than his cousin Stephanie. But she knew that the lightly lost are lightly won, and that if he was swayed into breaking this off, so surely would he soon drift into another and perhaps equally ineligible one. Therefore she was resolved that, as far as in her lay to prevent it, there should be no such swaying.

Her mother was standing out in the

garden enjoying the warm autumn night air when Stephanie arrived home, and Miss Fordyce got out of the carriage and joined her, walking up and down on the broad flag-stones that were under the drawing-room windows, through which the lamp-light streamed, lighting up those portions of the pavement on which the moon-beams did not fall.

“Aunt Ellen was not at home when I got there this evening, mamma,” she said.

“Why, where was she gone?” Mrs. Fordyce asked, with as prompt and profound an amazement as if Stephanie had recorded the fact of her esteemed relative having started off for Timbuctoo in a balloon.

“To Donne Place,” Stephanie went on abruptly, feeling that her mamma could express no more surprise than she had already expressed, whether she felt it or not.

"Good gracious!" Mrs Fordyce faintly articulated.

"Yes," Stephanie went on; and then she felt that before she said more it would be only kind to bring her mamma down from the heights of wonderment to which she had mounted, in order that she might have the pleasure of going up again—as proficients, in the arts in which I am a tyro, do,—so she asked,

"Is Willie still up?"

"No, no; but tell me,—Aunt Ellen?"

"First tell me about Willie, mamma dear, Aunt Ellen has no broken bones. Has Willie been more comfortable this evening? I fear not, as he's gone to bed."

"Oh yes! much better, that is, going on well, the doctor says. Dear boy, I'm sure I'm as anxious as— Well, and who did Ellen see, and why did she go? I'm sure I never,—it's quite upset me. What did she go for?"

Miss Fordyce was determined to give her mamma the full delight of a sensation header.

"To call on Miss Conway, who had her locked up as a maniac."

"Stephanie!"

"Mamma."

"You're joking."

"Indeed I am not, it's no joke at all, but a very unpleasant mistake."

"What a wicked, horrible girl," Mrs Fordyce said, warmly.

"Now, mamma, you couldn't say much more if I had told you she had poisoned Aunt Ellen. This looks like a mistake with a *soupçon* of malice in it, but it's scarcely wicked, is it? And if it was all a mistake, as she says it was, it's hard to call her a horrible girl for it."

"Stephanie, I'm surprised at your defending such infamous conduct," Mrs Fordyce said, with the tears in her eyes;

"I have tried to make my children respect my sister, and when she's locked up in a mad-house I'm told by you that it's neither wicked nor horrible."

Then Miss Fordyce, finding that her plan of toning down the terrible story had not met with its just reward, told it as it had been told to her, reserving only Aunt Ellen's opinions.

"So you see, mamma, no harm has been done," she wound up with; "at the worst, it was only an unpleasantness, that is, supposing it to be what Miss Conway says, a mistake."

"But I can't suppose it a mistake, Stephanie; and I shall tell Willie that it isn't, and put it to him that he can't after such a thing think of marrying such a girl."

"Then you'll be wrong, mamma; at least, I think so."

"Not so wrong—I'm sure I wouldn't



interfere—but not so wrong as that Miss Conway.”

“Two wrongs don’t make a right, mamma, and Willie must think and act for himself here. He’s very good-natured” (she had paused for a kinder word than ‘weak,’ which was the first that suggested itself)—“he’s very good-natured, and a little too apt to be turned about; but if we go judging and acting for him here, we may as well go on doing so all his life, and who made us his keepers?”

“Oh, Stephanie, not ‘judging and acting for,’ but counselling him; surely, yes, we ought to do that, his father’s sisters—”

“And he a man of thirty,” Stephanie interrupted; “no, no, mother dear, it was this that I have been wanting to come at all the time. Your counsel would be good enough and true enough, it would amount to this, if you were left to yourself, you’d say to him, ‘Do what is right.’ But you

will not be left to yourself. I know what Aunt Ellen is, and I'm dearly fond of her, but she only sees one thing at a time, and the thing she sees now is, that it would be well that Allondale should not marry this girl."

"And it would be well."

"From one point of view, but there are others."

"Stephanie, I didn't expect this from you."

"What, mamma? I am not saying one word in favour of this marriage; I know nothing for or against it, nor do you, nor does Aunt Ellen; that's why I want to leave Willie alone to act as a man should act."

"But after such a thing as this, Stephanie, to your Aunt Ellen too, who hates railroads and bulls,—oh! the terror she always had of bulls when she was a girl; and to be locked up in a dark room,

my dear Stephanie, I really wonder at your thinking Miss Conway's conduct excusable."

"But, mamma, she was innocent of the journey and of the bulls. You take the evils *en masse* and place them on her head, and that's not fair. But now I've something else to tell you." Then she proceeded to narrate all she had heard relative to the hitch in her other cousin's love affair.

"Thank goodness I've no such troubles with my children," Mrs Fordyce said fervently. "I think we'll go in now, Stephanie."

"I don't think you would make Mr Brown a trouble, mamma."

"Your Aunt Selina must have her reasons, my dear."

"Yes, she has; she has two reasons against giving her consent when they ask her for it; one is, that he spells his name

without an 'e,' and she might get over that ; but the other is an insurmountable objection,—he never will carry her goloshes and umbrella to church. Now you wouldn't care for the 'e' and you don't pine for unpaid lackeys, therefore I'm right in thinking that if ever your daughter is fortunate enough to win the love of such a true-hearted gentleman as Mr Brown, you won't make him a trouble."

"No, I don't think I should ; but still it's natural. When Selina married Mr Cornwell she was not thought to do as well as she ought to have done, and now her daughter to be thinking of marrying Mr Cornwell's curate."

"But, dear, there's such a difference in Mr Cornwell and his curate," Stephanie argued ; "you haven't seen Mr Brown, so you can't judge."

"What difference, Stephanie ? I assure you, Mr Cornwell was thought very highly

of, very highly indeed, at his college. He had a great reputation for learning when he first came down to take the living, and, indeed, we heard that if he hadn't taken the living he would have been Regius Professor, or something I'm not clear what."

"Very likely, and I dare say he wasn't clear either. The difference between them is that one's a man and the other's a muff. I don't want to say a word against Uncle James; I am always sorry when I see him brow-beaten and sent away like a melancholy old boy to his barren study; but though I'm sorry for him, I don't think that he has any business to let Aunt Selina and Boadicea sit in the seat of the scornful above Mr Brown, because Mr Brown happens to be his curate."

"Ah! well, it's of very small consequence compared to Allondale's affair," Mrs Fordyce said when she parted with Stephanie at her bed-room door. And Ste-

phanie thought so too, for, sensible girl as she was, she was guilty of the folly of marvelling what a man like Mr Brown could see in a girl like her cousin Connie to fall in love with.

Then she dismissed them from her thoughts, and fell to wondering what was the *personnel* of the blithely unscrupulous Miss Conway.

Stephanie took the communication of Miss Crespigny's attack and Miss Conway's repulse upon herself, and she told it to Lord Allondale precisely as she would have told it had his bride-elect and her outraged aunt both been present.

"Aunt Ellen's infuriated very naturally," she said in conclusion, "at Miss Conway's mistake—for she says it was a mistake."

"'Twas plucky of her, wasn't it? if it wasn't a mistake; by Jove! I don't know what she would stand at."

"She says it was a mistake, therefore I'll decline to go into the question of her pluck if it wasn't."

Lord Allondale had been laughing heartily at the thought of his aunt's discomfiture; Stephanie's tone checked his laughter.

"Of course, of course, 'twouldn't have been right if it wasn't, but—she's awfully pretty, you know, takes things quietly, not like the poor mare, Stephanie; she never heats herself at anything; she can do anything of the kind."

"Aunt Ellen admired Mrs Donne very much," Stephanie said. "Oh! and who do you think came back with Aunt Ellen, Willie?—Captain Donne, and he asked me if he might call here and see you."

"H'm! and didn't she admire Miss Conway?"

"No, I don't think she did—but under

the circumstances you could hardly expect her to do so."

"I wish to Heaven she wouldn't thrust herself into the midst of things that don't concern her," Lord Allondale said touchily after a few minutes,—his arm was very painful, and he felt helpless and cross,—“interfering with things she has no business to interfere with at all, and making herself an idiotic spectacle."

"She has paid for peeping this time, at all events, Willie. Don't let her think you're annoyed, she's hurt enough already."

"But what must they have thought—Miss Conway and Dora!—they're just the kind of girls to make it an everlasting joke and din it into my ears perpetually."

"Who is Dora?"

"Dora's Mrs Donne,—and Mrs Donne is uncommonly quick at seeing the ridiculous side of everything. Can't you fancy



the scene, Stephanie! Aunt Ellen charging about in the midst of the cattle with her bonnet hanging down her back. Of course Miss Conway thought her mad—she is mad with authoritativeness. Do her good, by Jove. When Miss Conway's Lady Allondale she would pit herself against anybody, if I am not very much mistaken."

"She'll be a pleasant element in the family if that's the case," Stephanie thought, but she only said,

"When she is Lady Allondale I don't suppose any one will be pitted against her, Willie."

A few days after this conversation Lord Allondale received a letter from Donne Place. A very lively, witty letter it was, containing a graphic account of Miss Crespigny's misadventures on that unlucky day, and it was enriched with pen-and-ink sketches illustrating these misadventures. It was a brilliant letter, and

its writer had spared no pains to make it so, for she thoroughly believed that a man likes that woman best who best amuses him. It was such a capital letter, that Lord Allondale quite regretted that he could not show it to his cousin Stephanie, but there were a few words of wisdom appended to the wit that he did not desire Stephanie to see.

From this letter he learnt that Miss Conway had gone back to town, and that Mr Donne meditated calling upon him. "That serpent has beguiled Lyster, so between them you will have to be very careful," he was told. And he felt that this caution might strike his cousin as curious.

Now during these few days Stephanie had abstained from riding Castaway in the morning, or driving with her mamma in the afternoon.

"It will be unkind to leave Willie,

I will sit and read to him," she would say when either modes of locomotion were proposed to her. Still Captain Denis Donne did not come, and once again Stephanie felt that he was hardly behaving as she would have desired Denis Donne to behave, and to fear that there was great truth in that unkind assertion of Lord Allondale's, relative to Captain Donne's admiration for his step-mother.

But though Captain Donne did not avail himself of the permission he had craved—though he shrank naturally enough from putting his head under the roof that sheltered Lord Allondale,—he did not, as on a former occasion, cease from all communication with the family.

"That young man has called two or three times, he really is most attentive," Miss Crespigny said one morning, when her niece wearied of reading to Willie,

and rode over to Thurlow Square for a change.

“What young man?” Stephanie asked, and then her aunt answered,

“Captain Donne—and how red riding makes your face, my dear.”

“It’s Castaway’s trot and the sun combined. Oh! Captain Donne has been here, has he?”

“Yes, and he is coming—oh, by the way, speaking of him reminds me of the Cornwells,—he met you there, he tells me. I have heard from Selina again; Mr Brown has proposed to Connie, and Connie has accepted him.”

“I’m very glad to hear it.”

“So am I, because those girls don’t get younger or lovelier year after year.”

“They are not singular in that, Aunt Ellen.”

“Well, I don’t know that they are,”

Miss Crespigny said, laughing good-temperedly, "but your Aunt Selina does make herself such a fool about them that it makes one say more than one would otherwise. She writes from her bed-room now, and signs herself a 'broken-hearted mother.' A nice life she leads them all, I expect, with her broken heart."

"You go down, Aunt Ellen, and put things straight," Stephanie said. She was very impatient that this digression to Connie's engagement should have put the statement of when Captain Denis Donne was coming again utterly out of Miss Crespigny's head.

"If I did, my dear, Selina would think that I ought to give them an establishment, Connie a carriage, and cause their house to be frequented by eligible men who would marry Boadicea," Miss Crespigny replied; "anything short of that would not put it straight as far as Selina's

concerned ; but I've written to Connie to tell her that I think she's a very fortunate girl."

"Aunt Ellen, you must do more than that when Connie's going to be married. I don't think that Mr Brown is the sort of man to want anything for either himself or his wife ; but before she is his wife you must be kind to Connie. You know what Aunt Selina will be about her *trousseau*."

"Do you mean that I'm to give it to her?"

"Just that," Stephanie said.

"Well, you're a bold beggar—bless you," the old lady replied, drawing her niece's face down and kissing it ; "but it's never for yourself, my dear, it's never for yourself ; it would please me so much more if it were, Stephanie."

"Then I'll ask this for myself,—be generous to Connie when she's going to be married to please me, and don't let her

know that I asked it, it will please her more if she thinks you thought of it entirely by yourself, as you would have been sure to do if I hadn't mentioned it."

"I suppose I must say yes to you, Stephanie, but how ever I shall make both ends meet this year I don't know." Then Miss Crespigny went into a committee of ways and means, and her niece had to listen to wails about the limited nature of her income, which wails did not affect Miss Fordyce very much, inasmuch as she had no faith in the soundness of the cause of them.

"When did you say Captain Donne was coming here again?" she asked after a time.

"I don't think I said at all, Stephanie; but he is coming, to-day, is it?—or to-morrow?—no, it must be to-day, because when I mentioned it to Thomas (I just happened to mention it to Thomas when

he was filling my glass on Friday or Saturday),—Saturday it must have been, because I had a bottle of Port opened on Saturday, not feeling very well; and it was just after he had filled it, and before I'd tasted it, that I said to him—that I mentioned—that I said,—let's see, what was it?"

"Captain Donne's coming we were speaking about."

"Oh! to be sure,—I'd eaten my words, as it were; do you ever do that, Stephanie? My poor father, who rather prided himself upon his manner of telling a story in early years, used to lose himself latterly and wander from the point, and it used to fatigue me very much to listen to him."

"Yes, I can quite fancy it," Stephanie struck in eagerly. "You were saying Captain Donne—a—a—"

"We used, after Selina had married Mr Cornwell, to make him go and sit with



papa and get up his stories when we were not in the room, and then when Lord Allondale lost himself, Mr Cornwell knew how to help him out with them. And I must say," continued Miss Crespigny, who in the interest of her reminiscences had entirely forgotten Denis Donne,—“and I must say that James Cornwell was as patient as an ass, my dear, and that he never had the presumption to curtail or in any way attempt to improve Lord Allondale's time-honoured anecdotes.”

“Was that Port good that Thomas was pouring out when you told him what day Captain Donne was coming? By the by, you haven't told me yet, Aunt Ellen—is it to-day?”

“Yes, I think it's to-day,” Miss Crespigny said, “or if it isn't to-day it's to-morrow; it's of very little consequence, only it looks well his paying such attention to an old woman like me.”

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And Stephanie Fordyce endorsed the last sentiment, though she could not the former one. It was of consequence to her when he came, for she was here to-day and might not be here to-morrow. But she could hardly, though she was a frank, outspoken girl, give vent to this expression of feeling.

“Stay here and have some luncheon, Stephanie—it will do you a great deal more good than if you go tearing up and down that nasty row.”

“But it won’t do my horse more good to stand outside and be fly-blown; and if I could persuade you to take a turn down the length of the row on Castaway, you’d never call the best piece of cantering ground in the country ‘nasty’ again.

“Well, perhaps not, my dear, for I should be the mad woman Miss Conway thought me if I were to do such a thing. Has anything more been heard about that girl?”

"Nothing, I believe."

"I'm very glad of it, and I hope nothing more will be heard. It was temporary insanity on Allondale's part."

"Now, Aunt Ellen, what would you say if a Duke, for instance, in a fit of temporary insanity proposed to me, and then rode away and took no further notice?—it's always temporary insanity in such cases—the head goes and the heart follows. Allondale can't be acquitted on that count."

"There's some difference between Miss Fordyce and Miss Conway," Miss Crespigny said coldly.

"Only the difference that pounds, shillings, and pence make, as far as I can understand," Stephanie said, rising up; "but we won't argue about it, Aunt Ellen, for you and I can't quarrel, and on that subject can't agree."

"No, we can't, my love. Come and dine with me to-night; I wanted you that

night poor Willie had his accident, but come to-night, will you?"

"Yes, I will."

"And if you like I'll take you to the French play at the St James. I hear they neither shriek nor shake the house, and that they speak and walk something like people do off the stage, so I should like to see them before they supply those things to the sure demand of the British playgoers; will you like to go?"

"Very much indeed," Stephanie said, and then she went off for her ride.

Stephanie Fordyce had been acting up to the noble command to do as we would be done by, in that she had been persuading her Aunt Ellen to do all that was possible to further the smooth running of the course of Miss Connie's true love. Therefore it is to be supposed that she was very happy, for is not virtue its own reward? despite her having been baffled in

the information she sought relative to Captain Denis Donne's next promised visit to Miss Crespigny.

But she was not very happy, and she acknowledged to herself that she was not very happy, and told herself that she was to blame for it. She felt annoyed with that weakness which caused her to palpitate, or to give a thought to it even, at the possibility of meeting with a man who was guilty of entertaining an unhallowed admiration for a married woman, and that woman his father's wife. Usually Lord Allondale's sketchy assertions with respect to other men made no manner of impression upon her. But in this instance it had made a very deep impression upon her, and she knew that it had, and felt annoyed with herself that it should be so.

She rode slowly along by the right-hand railing towards Apsley House, and she kept her head turned slightly over her

shoulder, as if she had discovered some object of interest in that interesting thoroughfare, the Knightsbridge road, but in reality, because by so doing she avoided the necessity of recognizing and speaking to any of the numerous acquaintances to whom she had no special desire to speak on this occasion. It took more than a trifle to put Miss Fordyce out, and cause her to feel bored. But at this epoch she was bored with a vengeance, for she was depressed and annoyed, and she had a foreboding that her depression and annoyance would be increased in fulfilling that programme which her aunt had laid out for their mutual enjoyment that evening.

She was a very fair specimen of a well-bred young Englishwoman as she held her handsome horse in to a walk, and rode slowly along. There could be no doubt about Miss Fordyce, even in that place where discernment is so sorely taxed. There

was not an unwanted button or an unnecessary bit of braid about her habit. And round the brim of her high riding-hat there was not an inch of superfluous tulle. The plain little black veil was not finished off at the back with a brace of huge bows and ends like pennons floating in the wind, vainly endeavouring to feminize what is feminine enough without any such endeavour on the head of a lady. In fact, there was nothing meretricious about her, and nothing showy about her horse. You remarked immediately that she did not ride to the audience, and that both horse and rider were excellent of their kind. But if you did not know her you remarked nothing further.

Truth to tell, she was riding Castaway with most reprehensible carelessness this morning, and she was recalled to a sense of her shortcomings in this respect by Castaway suddenly swerving to the near side,

and then returning to the path of duty by a series of plunges. Well-bred horse as he was, he could not always control an emotion of surprise, and he had experienced a profound one, when a young man who was leaning upon the rails swept off his hat in salute to Miss Fordyce. You see he was an English horse, and utterly unaccustomed to the society of men who signalized the fact of their existence before the lady had nodded an acknowledgment of it.

Of course Miss Fordyce sat the shy,—if I ever venture to unseat a heroine it shall be in a little country lane where no one can see her. For though the thing happens in real life, it detracts considerably from the heroine of romance ; the majority prefer her to be immaculate in every way, and it is well to respect the prejudices of the majority.

But though she remained in the saddle, the shy aroused her thoroughly from her



day-dream, and she looked for a cause for the emotion Castaway had displayed; looked with understanding, and saw Mr Goubaud. And while she was bestowing a bow of semi-recognition upon the young Frenchman, she saw something else.

Standing by his side, with her parasol resting upon the railings as if she had paused in unison with him to look at the riders, was a lady. And the appearance of this lady was of so prepossessing and so peculiar an order, that Miss Fordyce involuntarily gazed at her with such earnestness that it amounted to a stare.

There was nothing in her costume to account for this peculiarity of appearance, Stephanie observed. It was solely due to her brunette complexion and her blonde hair.

“What a distinguished-looking girl,” Stephanie thought, as she rode along, “she’s either the wife or the sister of my

friend of the other day. Her get-up is unmistakeably French, the same lace on her bonnet and mantle and parasol; an Englishwoman would have rushed into three manufactories probably. I couldn't understand the combination when Aunt Ellen spoke of Miss Conway's brown face and golden hair, but I can now, and I like it."

"Good style that girl is!" the object of Miss Fordyce's attention remarked of her as she passed by. Then the young Frenchman told Fanny Conway that that was the heroine of the adventure in which he had figured, and which he had already so fully recounted to her.

When she heard this, Miss Conway turned away from the railings, and walked slowly along towards one of the Knightsbridge road gates. She had no desire, while admitting of Mr Goubaud's escort, to risk another *rencontre* with a lady who had been riding with Lord Allondale.

The days had been very dull at Mrs Pridham's, the few days during which she had sojourned under the roof of that excellently conducted mansion. She was bereft of the two occupations which had of late afforded her much excitement, viz. fighting with Mrs Donne, and essaying to beguile Mrs Donne's husband. This bereavement reduced her to a state of dullness from which she could devise no other means of escape than by a revival of some of her old practices. Mrs Pridham was amiably blind to everything that went on in her mansion so long as she was paid, and so long as she saw a probability of being paid, and she was wont to declare that "both Miss Conway and Mr Goubaud was that punctual with their payments that she couldn't speak too highly of them." Had they not been so, perhaps the exemplary British matron might have seen cause for reprehension in the outrageous

flirtation into which the pair plunged. As it was, she was gracious and merciful, merely acknowledging it by a suave smile, and the declaration that young people would be young people.

Accordingly Miss Conway availed herself of the graciousness and mercy displayed in this view of the case and of her youth, and dressed for him and talked to him with a prodigality that came from the perfect security she felt in the unassailable condition of her own heart. He was clever in a glittering way that is more attractive than solidity, in a way that made her look to her own sentiments (or rather to the manner in which she enunciated them) sharply lest he should discover weak places in them. He was clever, and he talked grandiloquently about his "ideas" and his "career." This talk rather took her fancy and interested her, and made her contemplate the possibility of

playing Recamier to his Voltaire—Lady Blessington to his D’Orsay. So while contemplating this contingency—a friendship pure and simple—she improved the shining hours to the best of an ability that was by no means poor, and Mr Goubaud, despite the apparently frothy nature of his devotion, began to think melodramatic things of Lord Allondale.

This walk in the park with him was an error of judgment, and she felt it to be so directly she was told that the lady who had looked at her admiringly was the same one who had been riding with the discomfited horseman, who’s discomfiture had been the foundation on which Goubaud had built up the fair superstructure of his own gallantry and daring. She felt it to be an error of judgment, and she resolved upon saying that it was not herself, should Miss Fordyce ever revert to it

in the days to come when they might know one another.

She had carefully abstained from submitting her error to the eyes of the many. She had not suffered Mr Goubaud to go out with her, nor had she the most remote intention of suffering him to go home with her. She meant to speak of having met him in the park. But she also meant to declare that the meeting had been a freak of fate. That being the case, who could censure it?

When it occurred to her to give this explanation, which it did a few minutes after her abrupt withdrawal from the railings, Miss Conway was her own seductively sweet self again. She gave him her smiles and looks and words freely, to his great relief, for though her bonnet was very pretty, he had grown weary of that silent observation of the side of it to which

she had condemned him since the girl she had pronounced good style had ridden by.

It was about two o'clock when Stephanic Fordyce reached home that morning. She went at once into the room in which she expected to find her mother and cousin alone, to tell them of the promise she had been inveigled into giving of going to the theatre that night.

She found a stranger with them, a handsome high-bred looking gentleman, who was introduced to her at once as Mr Donne. Miss Fordyce flushed a little at sight of him, and regarded him with that kind of interest the father of the man she is in love with not unnaturally inspires a girl; and Mr Donne marked this interest, and was not displeased at it, though perfectly innocent of the cause. Indeed, he again made the slight mistake of attributing entirely to himself that which was entirely due to his son.

Lord Allondale was in an excellent frame of mind. As far as Fanny Conway's interests were concerned, Mr Donne's visit was a most judicious thing. It has been seen that in relation to her, the fact impressed itself upon him anew that all women are humbugs ! But for all that he liked and admired her, and in the course of his call on Lord Allondale's dislocated elbow, he made it clear to that easily-led nobleman that he did so. Lord Allondale speedily came to the conclusion that he might do worse than marry her. And shortly after, that it would be impossible (considering all things) to do better. But before the results of this friendly intervention are detailed, the fortunes of Miss Connie and Mr Brown must be followed.



## CHAPTER II.

## REBELLION AT THE RECTORY.

MR BROWN, it may be remembered, announced his determination to write to Miss Constantia Cornwell on that same day of his skirmish with her mamma. He made this announcement out in the hall, and the tones of his voice and the words that he uttered made themselves clearly heard in the room in which the two girls were sitting. When the sound of this decision fell upon their ears, Boadicea held up her head very haughtily indeed, so high, in fact, that she must have

hurt her throat in doing it, and Connie felt that she must not look for sympathy from that quarter.

Her prophetic soul had warned her—or shall I say her guilty conscience had smitten her with the conviction—that the murky state of the domestic atmosphere was owing to this sin of which she had been guilty, this grave sin of loving and being loved by a man who was ignominiously contented with his plebeian appellation, and callously indifferent to the suggestion that had been made to him that he should append an “*e*” thereunto.

Nor was this—and Connie knew it—the head and front of his offending. In time that lacking “*e*” might have been condoned, but he had done worse things than being born a Brown; he had disregarded the time-honoured claim of a Crespigny to have her goloshes and umbrella carried in procession after her; and Mrs Cornwell’s


heart was permanently hardened against him.

But despite these grievous errors, the daughter of that erred-against mother liked the offender well, and so, when she heard him state his intention of writing to her at once, she, knowing from certain signs and wonders that had gone before, that he could only write to her about what it would be very pleasant to her to hear,— she, knowing this, began to arm her soul against the maternal wrath to come, with the thought of how much she liked him herself, and how much Stephanie and her brothers liked him. Perhaps had he known that these latter reflections were needed to bolster up the stability towards him which Miss Connie was preparing to display, he might not have been flattered.

Mrs Cornwell did not return to her daughters after that interview with Mr Brown. She went back to the secluded

literary nook between the store-room and the butler's pantry, where Mr Cornwell kept his boots and wrote his sermons. And if Stephanie Fordyce could have seen her Uncle James's face when his wife appeared before him for the second time that morning with wrath on her brow, the young lady would have regarded him with even greater pity than she had hitherto experienced.

Mr Cornwell did make one feeble feint of going on with his sermon, and about the mildest of men there is a certain awfulness and solemnity when they have their pens in their hands officially. Women do interrupt them ruthlessly, but they feel a sort of wholesome awe the while, and they are not exactly surprised if the interrupted man snuffs out the small conversational taper they have lighted for him, with an angry snap. But Mrs Cornwell knew her husband's sermons too well to feel this



wholesome awe; familiarity had bred contempt, as usual, and she was not going to defer pouring out the vials of her wrath because of the aforesaid feeble feint.

"Well, Mr Cornwell," she began, "I hope now you'll allow that I am sometimes right, and that I do see a little of what's going on under my eyes?"

He resigned himself when she said that; when Mrs Cornwell defended herself against accusations that had never been made she was invincible.

"I am sure I have always had the highest opinion of your judgment and the firmest reliance upon it, Selina," Mr Cornwell said, deprecatingly, and then he gave up his weapon to the conqueror, as it were, by laying down his pen.

"Oh! stuff and nonsense, Mr Cornwell; if you had listened to me even, heard what I had to say, far less taken my opinion, and acted upon it, things would have

been different ; as it is now, if you don't act like a man who—who married into such a family as mine should act, I shall have no patience with you."

She very seldom had any patience with him he felt dejectedly, therefore her assertion that she should have none now did not surprise him. However, her nose was very red, and a very red nose was always a sign of great anger with her, so he felt that she was not to be trifled with, and asked,

"It is about Brown that you're annoyed, I suppose, my dear?"

"Yes, Mr Cornwell. Annoyed, indeed ; your curate has been here insulting me, here under the roof to which I came from a house you might respect, I think."

"No one respects it more ; but surely, Selina, you must be mistaken, Mr Brown is too thorough a gentleman to insult you purposely ; there must be some mistake."

Then angry Mrs Cornwell told him all. How she had diplomatically put it to Mr Brown that he should leave Fleet, because of certain reasons which existed, and which would render the desirable intercourse between rector and curate unpleasant and impracticable. And how then he had rudely dashed her diplomacy to the ground by declaring that though he was sorry for these reasons, he should still carry out his intention of proposing to her youngest daughter.

Mr Cornwell had always been placed in the position of treating his children as if he were the well-disposed, confidential, and very humble servant of their mamma. Now this is not a nice position for a man to be placed in with regard to his children, and Mr Cornwell felt something like a pang for that it should have been so, now that he sympathized with Connie, and wondered whether Connie would recognize

his sympathy. He did not think it a sad thing and a terrible, that Connie should love his curate. A good many of his faculties had been stultified, but still they retained enough of their original vigour to rise up and tell him in this strait, that Connie was lucky in that she was loved by such a man. He was fond of Connie, but as he thought of the pair and their respective merits, he did feel that propinquity had had a large share in the transaction. Mr Brown was not an idle, but he was an unemployed, man ; and though it is a not-to-be-controverted fact that industrious men are also liable to this weakness, still it must be owned that unemployed ones are its more sure and certain victims. It is the men who have nothing to do who may, with a clear conscience, cry "We are with you," in response to Mr Coventry Patmore's appealing declaration that



“ We who are married, let us own  
A bachelor's first thought in life  
Is—or the fool's not worth a groan—  
To seek a woman for his wife.”

*Crede experto !* Those who have tried must be the best judges, but we must confess that if Mr Coventry Patmore is right there are some who have caused a good many groans and sighs not worth them.

However that may be, it is certain that in this case Mr Cornwell was right in supposing that propinquity, like music, had been the food of love. And he did wish that the scales might fall away from the eyes of the wife of his bosom, and that she might come to see this great good thing which had befallen her daughter in its proper light.

While he was thinking this, Mrs Cornwell cut into his meditations with an imperative demand to be enlightened as to the course he proposed pursuing.

“And may I ask, Mr Cornwell, what you are going to do?”

“To do, my dear Selina? I suppose it is useless telling you that I think Connie is a fortunate girl, and will be a very happy one if we permit her to—to—”

“Mr Cornwell,” his wife interrupted, rising in the majesty of her wrath to heights that were terrible, “are you aware that you are speaking to me?”

And then she swept out of the room—(it is no figure of speech in these days to say of a fashionably-attired female that she sweeps hither and thither. Her intentions may be good to do nothing of the kind, but she cannot help herself). And as he heard her dress rustling angrily along like the wind through autumn leaves over the painted canvas in the hall, Mr Cornwell felt that it was a sad thing to be a husband and father—and nothing more.

When the luncheon bell rang, Connie felt that it would be a hard thing to go in and sit down with a sense of her guilt upon her, and eat what was provided just as if nothing had happened. The luncheon was usually a pleasant enough hour at the rectory. At it they were wont to discuss their plans for the afternoon, the faults and follies of their neighbours, Lord Allondale's escapes from divers dangers, Stephanie Fordyce's extravagance in the matter of dress, and other trifles of the like sort. But to-day Connie knew that there would be a cessation from these topics, and that she would be compelled to sit silent with the sense of her guilt upon her if her sister could not be won to a more congenial bearing.

"I wonder mamma has not come in again!" Connie said, throwing down her work when the bell rang. Miss Cornwell rose and looked at her own aristocratic

features in the glass, and when she had seen that she looked calm and undisturbed, and had given Connie ample time to see it too, she said.

“Do you?”

“I feel quite nervous,” Miss Connie went on, seemingly oblivious of the calm and composure with which Miss Cornwell had intended to impress her. “I feel quite nervous, for I heard, and so did you, didn’t you, Boadicea, what Mr Brown said when he was going away.”

“Nothing Mr Brown could say could make me nervous.” Then Miss Cornwell moved away to the door, and Connie sprang after her hastily, and placed her hand on Miss Cornwell’s shoulder.

“Oh, you must guess why it does me, Boadicea dear; don’t you turn against me too.”

“Turn against you too! what nonsense, Connie; who else has turned against

you ? If you were younger I should think you were going to be silly enough to fancy this something serious, and worth talking about."

With that the eldest daughter of the house went in and seated herself opposite to her mother at the table, and the culprit sat down with her back to the windows.

"Isn't papa coming in to luncheon ?" Boadicea asked, and Mrs Cornwell told her "No, they needn't wait."

"Are you not going to have anything, mamma ?" Miss Cornwell asked presently, with that sort of tender sympathetic surprise that falls with such aggravating reproach on the ears of a third and unsympathetic person.

"Nothing for me," Mrs Cornwell said, folding her lips tightly together when she had said it. And then she sighed heavily and planted her chin on her hand, and

gazed out of the window into space till Connie could bear it no longer.

"Are you not well, mamma?" Connie asked.

"Yes, I am quite well."

"Then why don't you have some luncheon, you shouldn't neglect this pork-pie. Come, mamma, let me give you some."

"No, *thank* you, Connie," her mother replied, so sharply that Connie started as if she had been shot, and refrained from further speech.

"Are you going out this afternoon, mamma,—for a drive, I mean?" Boadicea said after a time, during which Connie's jaws had seemed to her own ears to creak painfully.

"No, I do not feel at all well, and I shall not go out," Mrs Cornwell said, removing her chin from her right to her left hand, and gazing now abstractedly at the

portrait of her late father, Lord Allon-dale.

“Then we can have the carriage, I suppose? we ought to go out and call on Mrs Donne and the Thurfields.”

“Not on Mrs Donne till I can go with you,” her mother replied. “But I’m sure I don’t know when that will be,—ah! ah!”

“But to the Thurfields, mamma, we ought really, I think?”

“Very well, I think you’d better, perhaps, and you can tell Fanny Thurfield, with my love, that I’m very sorry I shall not be able to take her to that ball.”

Now that ball had been rather a fondly anticipated thing for some time. It was to take place under very brilliant auspices, in one of the biggest rooms in the county, the ball-room, in fact, of the barracks, that were situated in the county town. Invitations to it had been delivered circum-spectly, and not to be asked to it was to

be found wanting in some of the requisites the said circumspection had been brought to bear upon. They could not career round the circle of their acquaintances, impressing upon all that they had been asked, and didn't choose to go. So for this and various other reasons Miss Cornwell did not like the threat contained in that assertion of disability to chaperone Miss Thurfield, as had been promised.

"I really think, after letting her get her dress and all, that you can't draw back, mamma; whatever we might wish to do ourselves, we ought not to disappoint Fanny."

"That's a neat way of putting it, Boadicea—'whatever we might wish to do ourselves,' as if we didn't wish to go, when of course we do, as why shouldn't we? At any rate, if mamma's had something to put her out, you've had nothing, so it's affectation your pretending not to wish to go."



Connie spoke warmly, she felt that Boadicea was ready to hit her now that she was down, and her annoyance at this, combined with her anxiety relative to that letter, the advent of which she was expecting, had rendered her cross.

“I think,” Mrs Cornwell said, coming out of her abstraction, and speaking with a snappish sorrow that was a trying thing to hear,—“I think, Constantia, that if you displayed less temper it would be more becoming under the circumstances.”

“What are the circumstances, mamma?”

Now this question direfully aggravated Mrs Cornwell, for she could hardly blame Connie for things as far as they had gone. In the future there was great reason to suppose that Connie’s conduct would be not at all what was seemly on the part of one who had been bred and nurtured in a disbelief of curates, from a ma-

rimonial point of view. But as far as things had already gone, Connie had not been guilty of aught that merited reprehension.

Now Mrs Cornwell knew all these things, and acknowledged the truth of them, and still she felt very angry with Connie. She was conscious that according to the letter of the law this child of hers was blameless. She was unprepared, therefore, with a direct answer when Connie asked for a specific definition of those "circumstances" which would have rendered a display of better temper becoming.

Being unprepared with a direct answer, Mrs Cornwell dashed into a quotation, a rash thing to do when one is angry.

"Oh! 'sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child,' as Solomon says."

"Solomon never said it, mamma, it's Shakespeare you're thinking of. And how

am I thankless?" Connie was foolish enough to suggest and inquire.

And on that Boadicea said,

"Really, Connie, you're too tiresome."

And Mrs Cornwell rose and hastily departed from the room, in order that the offender against whom the *acte d'accusation* was not fully made out yet, might labour under the impression until their next meeting that her iniquities were the cause of her mother shedding bitter tears.

"I shall order the carriage at once," Miss Cornwell said, after a few minutes had elapsed. "Perhaps you won't mind coming up and dressing now, Connie?"

Now the folly of Mr Brown having announced his intention aloud was shown, Connie could not bear to go away with the chance of its arriving during her absence, and of Mr Brown having it returned to him unopened. He might think that she sent it back herself, and might never

address her again, and Connie liked him too well to lose him.

“I had no intention of going out to-day. I’d much rather stay at home, if you won’t mind going to the Thurfields without me.”

“But I do mind going without you, I mind it very much; if Fanny’s not at home, I shall be obliged to go in and yell all the news of the neighbourhood into Mrs Thurfield’s trumpet, and I think, as you share the pleasures of their house, you might share the nuisance of entertaining its mistress with me.”

“So I will another day. Wait, and I’ll go with you to-morrow.”

“Why not this afternoon. It’s nonsense, Connie, you might just as well come this afternoon.”

Miss Cornwell, in her character of elder sister, was rather inclined to be arbitrary at all times, and now that there was a

prospect of Connie being married first, she was doubly inclined to be so. Therefore she infused a little of the true Crespigny authoritativeness into her demand to know the reason "why not this afternoon?"

"One can't always tell why one don't want to do a thing. I'd rather not go out to-day, and there's an end of it."

"No, Connie, not an end of it. I'm not deaf, and I'm not blind, and I couldn't help hearing what Mr Brown said, and I can't help seeing now that you're holding yourself cheap, and wanting to wait in for his letter."

"And if I am?"

"If you are, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Connie. You see how it's annoying mamma; and as you'll have to give it up, even if he hasn't already, and he isn't hurrying himself about that letter—so you might just as well give it up at once."

Connie's fair, plump, pretty face grew crimson all over as her sister spoke.

"Have to give it up! you speak as if I were a child," she said; "it makes me think, Boadicea, that if it had been you instead of me, you would have been kinder to me."

"Mr Brown's attentions, as far as they have gone, are nothing to boast about, my dear," Miss Cornwell said angrily, and when Miss Cornwell was roused to anger she always blushed in her nose, and otherwise resembled her mamma. "They have been marked, but they are not well defined; however, if you prefer waiting for Mr Brown's letter to paying the Thurfields the common civility of a call, I can only say I hope you'll get it."

Then Miss Cornwell went away to dress, and soon after her sister saw her rolling away in state behind the pair of

horses that had seen their best days before they came to Fleet Rectory.

"I hope to goodness he'll have written before you come back," Connie said, apostrophizing the unconscious Miss Cornwell, "for it's horrid to be told that I'm the more impatient of the two, and not to be able to say that I ain't."

Mr Brown had been very injudicious in making that assertion as to writing to Connie aloud in the way he had done, and when he reached home he felt that he had been injudicious. Not that he thought much of Connie's having possibly heard him; she might, or she might not; her having not done so would merely mitigate the evil in a measure, not altogether obviate it. What he repented him of was this, that he should have declared that he would write to Connie before he had been suffered to see Connie's father. He had no desire to set the girl in rebellion to her

parents if it could be avoided, and he did put considerable trust in his own eloquence, as far as bringing his rector round to his side was concerned.

However, he had promised that he would write to Connie, and so write he must, but he did not, as Boadicea had observed, set about it with any undue haste. He walked about for some little time with a cigar in his mouth and his hands in his pockets. After that he went out into the village to see two or three people whom it was expected he would see. And when he had given one a shilling, and another an order on his housekeeper for wine, and a third a ditto on the same for anything in the way of meat she liked to ask for, Mr Brown went home and wrote his letter, and despatched it by his boy to the rectory.

The letter was like the man, such letters always are. It was not affectionately



abject and imploring, but it was just as frank, kind, and manly as he was himself. It recorded the interview with her mother, and her mother's objections to the course he was now pursuing, lightly and briefly. This he did not because of any desire on his part to undervalue Mrs Cornwell's claim to the obedience and respect of her children, but because in all sober verity he did hold likes and dislikes, such as Mrs Cornwell expressed and conceived, to be very unimportant things. And then he told her what his prospects were, neither vauntingly nor humbly, and asked her if she would share them with him?

This letter was given to Connie when she emerged from her room, whither she had fled at the sound of the carriage-wheels in order to escape Boadicea's questions and remarks. She remained in the room till six o'clock, when her father usually came into the drawing-room from his study, and

then feeling for the first time in her life that his presence would be her protection, she went down-stairs and met her letter.

“ Mr Brown’s boy’s waiting, Miss,” she was told ; and this act of the boy’s, which had not been included in his master’s order, settled the matter. Had she given time to the consideration of the melancholy days that were in store for her before she could be married,—had she placed it, while still a but half-accomplished fact, before those who could most surely have striven to prevent its accomplishment, she would probably have sighed and groaned, considered herself blighted, and given him up. But through the boy electing to wait, immediate action was forced upon her ; and when people act on impulse they usually obey the dictates of their hearts. Consequently she went into her father’s study, and wrote such a reply as Mr Brown had been justified in expecting. When

she had sent it off she walked into the drawing-room, where her father and mother and Boadicea were, with a something in her face that told these latter that the deed was done.

"Connie, how is it you didn't go with your sister?" Mrs Cornwell asked with the voice of one who had borne many things patiently, but whom this last blow had stung into action. "I particularly wished you to go to the Thurfields."

"I didn't know that, mamma," Connie said.

"And if you had known it, I am sorry to say that I think it would have made very little difference; my wishes have ceased to have any weight with you."

"Oh, mamma!" Connie began deprecatingly, and then the reflection came to her that no one ever did come off better for using deprecating words and manners towards Mrs Cornwell. Constantia was a

dutiful, affectionate daughter; but she could not help being conscious that when her mamma detected signs of fear in any person she became harsher in her dealings to that person forthwith. So now she changed her tone from deprecation to determination, and said,

“Mamma, that’s very unfair of you. I’m not aware that I have ever disregarded your wishes, and I’m sure I never did knowingly. If I’m obliged to do so now, I shall be very miserable, but I shan’t be able to help it.”

“Pray don’t let us have a scene,” Boadicea said, and Mrs Cornwell sighed and leant back in her chair with her handkerchief over her eyes.

“I don’t want to have either a scene or a secret,” Connie went on. “Papa, Mr Brown has made me an offer, and I’ve accepted him, and if you’ll speak out you’ll tell me that I’m right.”

“Such effrontery after such duplicity,” Mrs Cornwell sobbed ; and her saying this utterly prevented Mr Cornwell speaking out in the manner his child had desired. He had the will to do it, but he lacked necessary courage.

“Mamma, there’s been no duplicity ; and as to effrontery, do you think I liked coming in and telling it out without the help of a single kind word, as I have told it ? It is only because I wouldn’t have you say that there has been any duplicity, that I came and told you what he asked me before my answer can have reached him.”

“Pray, Connie, don’t annoy mamma any more. Don’t you see that she can hardly bear it ?” Boadicea said, loftily. And when her eldest daughter’s assertion that she could hardly bear it fell upon Mrs Cornwell’s ears, she rose, declaring herself to be a broken-hearted mother, and at once ascended to her bed-room, the door of which

she double-locked. When dinner was on the table, and Boadicea went to inform her of the fact, Mrs Cornwell further marked the depth of her woe by refusing all sustenance through the key-hole.

While Miss Cornwell was executing her filial office under difficulties, Connie redeemed the time in the only way that was left to her, and surely it was the best.

“Papa,” she whispered, putting her arms round his neck and dragging his face down to her own, “you’ve not said one word. Say it now, dear. Tell me that you’re not angry—tell me that you’re pleased.”

“I’m pleased, but you’d better not say so to your mother, my dear. I like Brown uncommonly, but he has unfortunately succeeded in creating a deep prejudice against himself in your mother’s mind. It’s very unfortunate—very unfortunate indeed; and I must say,” continued Mr Cornwell, his

normal veneration for the Crespigny stock coming up and partially routing his chronic affection for his child,—“and I must say, a—that I shall think better of Mr Brown if he succeeds in removing this unfortunate prejudice,—very much better, indeed, I may say, my dear.”

“No, papa, that he never will,” Connie said firmly. The mere thought of her lover’s character imparted something like decision to the girl’s.

“I should hope that he will at least endeavour to do so,” Mr Cornwell said, with severe dignity. His wife, she who had been a Miss Crespigny, had retired up-stairs in tears, and was purposing to remain dinnerless on account of this young man, and this reflection considerably tempered Mr Cornwell’s enthusiasm for his curate.

“No, papa, and he’ll never try, because trying to please mamma means doing

things that mamma has no right to expect gentlemen to do,—things that no gentleman will do, in fact. Just ask yourself, papa, why a more submissive bearing should be expected from Sydney?" (she blushed as she called him by his name for the first time to her father) "than from Allondale, or Charlie Fordyce, or any other; he's better bred and better educated, and better looking, not that that's anything to do with it. Mamma wouldn't take offence with Allondale if he didn't jump at an invitation to dinner given ten minutes before we sat down, when somebody else failed, and that is one of the worst of Mr Brown's faults in her eyes."

"I have no doubt it will be all right in time," her father said, nervously; "meanwhile the less you say about the cause of your mother's dislike to him the better, I think, my dear."

And then Boadicea came down and



declared that mamma was quite ill and upset : and suggested in a hushed whisper that the house should be kept very quiet. Which suggestion, as was intended, reduced both the passive and the active offender to a state of melancholy depression that Miss Cornwell found it vastly pleasant to contemplate.

Connie made one more effort to win some expression of sympathy from her sister that evening. Miss Cornwell, on their return to the drawing-room after a sufficiently uncomfortable dinner, had rendered herself as unapproachable as was possible physically. She had placed herself in an arm-chair, and drawn a little stand with a candle and a heap of books upon it close to her side, and she had assumed a look of intense interest in the first volume she placed her hand upon, which happened to be a "History of Church Architecture," a valuable work in its way, but scarcely of

an order to absorb the attention of a young lady who was not resolved upon being absorbed. Connie, unable either to work or read herself, watched the back of that book and its fat gilt-lettered title until she could bear the silence no longer.

"How strangely things come about, don't they?" she said; and by way of reply Boadicea uttered the always discouraging words,—

"I beg your pardon, I don't quite understand you."

"I was thinking about Mr Brown—Sydney, I suppose I may as well call him now."

"Oh! well, as it hasn't 'come about' yet, perhaps it would be just as well that you should not call him Sydney. I don't wonder at your anxiety to do so, however, for it's more euphonious than his other name. Fanny Thurfield asked me to-day if our 'dancing dervish would go to the

bull with us.' I didn't know when she asked that she was making a not too honourable mention of my future brother-in-law."

"Fanny is not happy in her designations when she tries to be satirical. I wonder you knew who she meant."

"She had been speaking of Mrs Donne a minute before, and of how outrageously she behaves when she finds a partner she likes—dancing with him all the evening; and she said she wondered that Mrs Donne had not selected papa's curate to honour in that way; and then it was she told me he was called the 'dancing dervish.'"

"I've seen Fanny Thurfield, and you too, Boadicea, waltz with one man the whole night, and I don't think either of you thought you were doing anything outrageous, but never mind that now. I want you to tell me what you think, independent of mamma's objections, about Mr

Brown. He'll be a very good-natured brother-in-law if you'll only be civil to him."

"Civil! I shall always be civil."

"Not in a high and mighty way, Boadicea. He'll just take the same line with you as you do with him," Connie said warmly. She was getting out of patience with this assumption of contempt for a man for whom it was not possible to feel it." I wish the boys were home," she continued. "I wish Stephanie was here; they'd have the kindness and the courage to say the truth, that I'm a happy, lucky girl, instead of trying to make me feel wretched and ashamed of myself."

## CHAPTER III.

## THE TEMPTATION.

“MAMMA, we must call on Miss Conway; we ought to have thought of it before,” Stephanie Fordyce said, going into her mother’s room just previous to starting for that not too fondly anticipated evening’s diversion with Aunt Ellen. For some unexplained reason Mr Donne’s opinion had considerable weight with Miss Fordyce, and Mr Donne evidently thought very good and flattering things of the future Lady Allondale.

“Well, I suppose we must,” Mrs Fordyce said in her usually acquiescent manner. She would have said, “I suppose we must,”

had Stephanie told her that for divers reasons it was desirable they should take up their abode on the top of the monument.

"Perhaps you had better tell Willie that you mean to do so while I'm away to-night, mamma?—it will be nicer if it looks like coming from you entirely, wont it?"

"Yes, it will," Mrs Fordyce said promptly. "I can tell him that you didn't think of it before, or we would have gone to her."

"Best say that you didn't think of it, if you tell him it was not thought of at all; but I think that's one of the things that are better left untold."

"So do I," Mrs Fordyce answered, "so I'll only say that we're going now. As you say, there's no occasion to tell everything," Mrs Fordyce continued sagely, and with an impressiveness that was touching in the extreme, coming as it did come from the

lips of one who amiably informed all who would listen to her about all things of which she herself possessed the slightest knowledge. Then, having settled that matter of the call that was advisable, considering all things, Miss Fordyce went away to that dinner with her aunt, from which she prudently did not anticipate much pleasure.

It came upon her with the delightful shock of the water douche, that sight that met her eyes as soon as she entered the room in which she had expected to find her Aunt Ellen, and her Aunt Ellen alone. Captain Donne was standing up by the mantelpiece, talking to Miss Crespigny, and though he was standing up, there was about him the air of one who was going to remain to dinner; there was nothing like going away in his aspect, and that it was so, despite her annoyance with him

about many things, was very pleasing to Stephanie.

"My dear child! I've persuaded Captain Donne to stay and dine and escort us to the theatre; isn't it kind of him," Miss Crespigny said. And Stephanie replied "very," and tried to look unconcerned, and failed in looking anything but uncommonly pleased.

But though this strongest emotion she felt relative to him would not be repressed, he felt that another and less flattering one existed, and it occurred to him that the daring Miss Conway might have mentioned him to Lord Allondale in a way that had not sounded good in Stephanie's ears. "And yet why should she concern herself about me?" he thought, and then he remembered the days at Fleet Rectory, and wondered whether she remembered them too.



She told him, when the going down to dinner had thawed away some of the reserve that owed its existence to a mutual misunderstanding, about Mr Donne's visit to Lord Allondale. And when the young soldier heard his father's name in connection with that of the man who had shielded himself from the effects of a dubious something in a dubious way, his face grew hot, and some of the annoyance he felt betrayed itself.

"He's jealous of his own father, I do believe," Stephanie thought, as she marked the flush and annoyance. "What an evil genius that Dora must be, to have power over the hearts of such men as Mr Donne and his son."

"Your father must have been a remarkably attractive man when he was young," Miss Crespigny said; and then she laughed and continued in her usually can-

did way, "and he thinks himself so still if I'm not very much mistaken."

"And well he may, Aunt Ellen," Stephanie said quickly. Stephanie was disposed to overrate the father's claims, if possible, before this son, to whom she was, on Allondale's light accusation, accrediting all manner of evil designs.

"And well he may indeed, as you say, Stephanie, with such a lovely young wife as he has got." Miss Crespigny went on. "A more suitable age for you than for your father, I should imagine, Captain Donne."

"Who? Mrs Donne? yes, she is pretty, but not my style," he said quietly. And Stephanie immediately appended the one of foul deceit to the list of his other bad qualities.

"She's ten times prettier than that Miss Conway, with her yellow hair and her

brown face, that they all think so lovely," Miss Crespigny said crossly. Then to divert the stream of abuse that would otherwise have rippled on for awhile, Stephanie described the beautiful girl with the fair hair and the brunette complexion, whom she had seen in the park that day with the young Frenchman.

"Mamma's going to call on Miss Conway soon—Mr Donne tells us that she's come up to town," Stephanie said. And then she mentioned Fanny Conway's address in Fitzhugh Square, and Denis Donne wished he had the right to say something that might deter Miss Fordyce from mixing herself up with the shameless benefitter by his step-mother's shady conduct.

Captain Donne was not given to the bestowal of analytical consideration upon many things, least of all upon the devious paths which remarkably pretty women

pursued. But he had been more than ordinarily infatuated with this girl who had thrown him over without solicitation, and he was experiencing a revulsion to her now that might be lasting, or might be only temporary, but that, at any rate, was far from weak. He had been more than ordinarily infatuated with the lovely semi-Spaniard, but so had he been in days gone by with Miss Fordyce, and he could not help wishing that the intercourse between the two should be of a limited nature.

“You have not been to see Lord Al-  
londale? I told him that you were going  
to call upon him,” Stephanie said to Cap-  
tain Donne, after a long debate in her own  
mind as to whether it would be more  
dignified to pass over the breakage of his  
promise to call in silence, and thus allow  
him to suppose her piqued; or to remind  
him of it as she would have done any other

casual acquaintance, and thus show that it lived in her memory.

She said this when they had taken their seats in the orchestra stalls—a situation Miss Crespigny first insisted upon securing, and then objected to roundly when she discovered that she was compelled to speak across her niece if she would carry on a conversation with the young man whose attentive bearing when she had been in dire distress had been alleviating, and was agreeable to look back upon. Miss Crespigny was a sensible woman—her name, indeed, for sense and discretion was a tower of strength in her family. But for all that, she did like to feel that men who's blood and brains years had not cooled and steadied, could take pleasure in her society and conversation when neither were relieved by such extraneous aid as her niece might afford.

So now when Stephanie made her little

remark relative to the non-fulfilment of Captain Donne's promise, Miss Crespigny asked sharply,

"What are you saying, my dear? what is that?" for she had no desire and no intention of being left out of the conversation, and suffered to indulge in the luxury of undisturbed thought.

"I was only saying Captain Donne has not been to call on Willie, as he said he would," Stephanie answered, in a tone that was not quite free from the annoyance she felt at the snow-flake she had dislodged being set rolling in this way.

"And why should he have called?" Miss Crespigny muttered in a low tone. She began to fear that she had been injudicious in putting this handsome young soldier in the path of her niece. Stephanie through his agency might widen the gulf that already existed between Allondale and herself! And even now that dream of uniting

the head of her house with the sole daughter of it for whom she cared, was dear to her heart, too dear for her to like to be reminded that she might be compelled to awake from it.

The slight distraction she had made obviated the necessity of Denis Donne's replying to Stephanie's question; he had commenced speaking, and she had turned her head to listen to her aunt. So he paused for a minute, and when Stephanie looked round again, he made some remark about the stage, the business of which had begun. And soon the temptation to remember none of his shortcomings, and to be pleased with him as he was to-night, and as he had been at Fleet, was upon Stephanie. And for a while she succumbed to the temptation, and ceased to be false to her nature, and suspect without sufficient cause.

He had but recently come from the

contemplation of the charms of women who were more replete with them perhaps when regarded with merely the bodily vision than Stephanie Fordyce. There was a *luxe* of loveliness about both Dora and Fanny, and they were never chary of it. They set it off in every possible way that occurred to their fertile brains. Their claims to beauty were strong, and they were resolute in maintaining them, and there is a great deal in this! Many moderately good-looking women reign as beauties by reason of the firm faith they manifest in their own superiority of personal appearance; faith is contagious. What the possessor so evidently believes in the world feels must exist.

And there was no doubt about it, both Mrs Donne and Miss Conway had good grounds for their belief, and the votaries of their creed were not deluded with a mere idea. But still, remembering Dora's lus-



cious loveliness, and Fanny's bewitching peculiarities that made her so marked a woman, see her where you would,—still remembering these things as he did, Miss Fordyce looked a very fair thing in his eyes, with her blonde English colouring, and her honest English face.

The play (*La Tentation*) was one that very few people saw unmoved. Whether the heart-chords were legitimately struck is an open question; that the imagination was deftly manipulated there can be no manner of doubt about. And as Stephanie Fordyce followed the career of the wife who was immaculate in the flesh, and guilty in the soul—or immaculate in the soul, and less spotless in the flesh, which was it?—she paid the accomplished actress the same uncomfortably tearful tribute that has been lately paid to Miss Bateman's skill in striking attitudes. There must be an exquisite bliss in intense pain, otherwise

we should not all of us turn for our relaxation to the painted, acted, or printed portrayal of the miseries ensuing from the breaking of some one of the commandments, whenever we feel overburthened with the delights of real life.

Let this be as it will, there was little enough bliss in the sensations Stephanie experienced as she attempted both to sob and to look at Captain Donne without letting either sob or look be seen. And looking in his face she saw there what she mistook for sorrowful contrition, but what was in reality a healthy, hearty, manly aversion to the subject in every possible light in which it could be shown.

"It's a charming play, and charmingly it was acted," Miss Crespigny said, during the few minutes Captain Donne was with them when they came out, before her carriage could be brought up to the entrance.

"I hate the style of thing, and the

morbid false sentiment it evokes," Denis Donne said decidedly. And Stephanie liked him better for that speech, even though it conveyed a censure to her, for had it not evoked a display of emotion from her? She liked him better for that speech than if he had made the conventional one, palliating the crime and suggesting sympathy for it.

He had been desirous of saying something that should prove his intention of not suffering their renewed acquaintanceship to drop again all the evening. And he had been desirous of saying it for Stephanie's information alone. There was a difficulty attending the accomplishment of this without an appearance of design when they were in the theatre. But there was none when they were coming out through the crush! It was only to turn Miss Crespigny's head with a whispered indication of some one who was notorious

for something, and then while Miss Crespigny was gazing at the notoriety with an interest she would have repudiated feeling, Captain Donne said to Stephanie,

“You asked me why I haven’t called on Lord Allondale? I will tell you my reason some day. In the mean time, will you believe that it’s a good one, and not be sorry to see me if I wait till he is gone?”

Stephanie knew that in the nature of things it behoved her to feel as tenacious of anything like a slight being offered to, or an aspersion being cast upon, Allondale as if he were a brother. She knew this, and yet she could not feel tenacious. She looked into the face of the man on whose arm she was leaning, and felt in her heart that if there was a cause of quarrel between Lord Allondale and Captain Donne that right was with the latter. She could not feel tenacious at the possibility of a slight being offered, or an aspersion cast

upon her cousin, and yet she knew that she ought not to acquiesce in it.

"I shall never be sorry to see you," she began in a low tone, "but I should see you with more pleasure if you did not deal in mysterious enigmas about my cousin. There's nothing strained in my saying that he's been like a brother to me all my life;" and then she tried to smile, and added, "I can't be very friendly with a foe of his."

"I'm sorry for that," Denis Donne said.

"Unless you'll tell me why you won't meet Willie," she went on, and a troubled look came into the eyes that were bent full upon him. She was thinking that perhaps the cause might be found in Allondale's knowledge of Captain Donne's regard for his step-mother.

"I could tell the reason to a sister or a wife if I had either, Miss Fordyce, but I couldn't to any other woman," he replied.

And she, remembering that he had started by declaring that he might tell it to her some day, blushed a quick, warm, joyous blush, and was glad when the moment came for her to hide her face in the darkness of the carriage.

“Tell me I may come,” he whispered, retaining her hand in his for an instant while Miss Crespigny was engaged in adjusting herself. His tones and his eyes, and the memories she had kept of him since those happy days at Fleet, tempted her sorely. She did not stay to count the cost of the light pressure she gave in response to that warm one he had bestowed upon her hand. She did not stay to count the cost,—what woman does pause and consider the price of anything she desires very much? She just gave it, and with it an assurance to this man, whose perfect integrity she still doubted, that he was to her more than other men. And when she

gave him that, Denis Donne wanted no words to tell him that "he might come." *La Tentation* had not been confined to the boards that night.

Aunt Ellen was tired, and the excitement was over, and she was accustomed to be cross with impunity to any member of her family who might chance to be with her at the moment. These things combined on the present occasion to make her an unpleasant companion to Stephanie during their short drive from the St James' to Thurlow Square. Her voice rose above the rolling wheels in objection to Miss Conway, and reprobation of her sister Selina, and uncomplimentary expressions of gratitude to the Lord for his having been good enough at last to send a man to marry Connie. Stephanie foresaw large doses of gruel and many pages of prayers for her Aunt Ellen's household that night, and sagaciously declined Miss Crespigny's offer

of remaining in Thurlow Square instead of going on to her own home.

"If I'd thought you wouldn't stay, my dear, I should have driven round by Kensington, and not have left you to go all that way by yourself," Miss Crespigny said pettishly.

"But, aunt, that's not quite reasonable; how often I do it."

"That doesn't make it right one bit the more," Miss Crespigny went on, tartly; "of course you ought to be a married woman by this time, and it's very mortifying, very mortifying, indeed, to me that you are not. I feel it, Stephanie, I do, I assure you. I say little, but I feel it very deeply. I shall go down to my grave with the conviction that you'll be running about all the best years of your life without a proper chaperone in a way that's most unbecoming for Lord Allondale's grand-daughter."

This was the one thing that Stephanie



never would suffer in silence. She took more pride in being her father's child than in being the grand-daughter of Lord Allondale.

"Aunt Ellen, that's nonsense. I never do a single thing—I wouldn't for the world, and mamma would die with shame if she thought me capable of it—that could bring the lightest shadow on my father's name, and while that's the case you needn't be jealous for Lord Allondale's grand-paternal claims; they're attended to quite enough in the family."

Miss Crespigny felt very cross, and it was safer to bring dejection than anger to bear upon Stephanie. Aunt Ellen was wise even in her wrath on this occasion, so she sighed and said,

"Ah, my dear, I seem an ill-tempered old woman to you, I dare say, but it's not ill-temper, Stephanie, it's downright unhappiness and disappointment, my child,

to think that Willie should have been such a fool, and that you should show yourself ready to encourage his folly. And what was that young man saying to you when he put you into the carriage?" Miss Crespigny went on with a refreshingly rapid change of tone.

"He was saying something more about calling," Stephanie replied.

"Oh, calling! and what did you say to him?" continued the domestic detective of the house of Allondale.

"I said nothing," Stephanie said, laughing. Though she was remarkably honest and outspoken, she did not think it necessary to tell her aunt that she had been wrought upon by divers things to give him something "more exquisite still" than mere words.

"There's a letter from Connie," Mrs Fordyce said as soon as Stephanie came into the room. "I've told Willie that

we're going to call on Miss Conway to-morrow; he's delighted, and I've waited up to hear what news there is from Fleet."

"Connie's in trouble," Stephanie said when she had read the letter, "and she wants me to do what she calls a 'good-natured thing.' Can you spare me for a day or two, ma?"

"To go down?"

"Yes, to go down and be intensely desirous of going to that ball. Miss Thurfield doesn't want Aunt Selina to chaperone her any more, because her brother's wife has undertaken the office; and Aunt Selina is cantankerous about Connie's engagement, and says she won't go at all, and poor Connie's in despair, her opportunities of seeing Mr Brown are severely limited, and he's to be there."

"Your Aunt Selina must have her reasons," Mrs Fordyce said. The tenderest and most yielding of mothers practically,

she was theoretically a staunch advocate for the unbounded rights and privileges of parents over their offspring.

“Well, I’ll see if her reasons are good enough to hold out against her craving to please Aunt Ellen through pleasing me. Poor Connie! why shouldn’t she go and meet her lover in a crowd if she can’t meet him elsewhere?”

“Why not, indeed?” Mrs Fordyce rejoined. She believed Stephanie’s lightest assertion to be unanswerable argument. “Have you had a pleasant evening with Ellen?”

“Very,” Stephanie said, emphatically.

“I thought you didn’t look tired when you came in, and generally the theatre tires you dreadfully; or didn’t you go, after all?”

“Yes, we went. Good night, mamma. And Captain Donne went with us,” she answered, walking out of the room.

"Perhaps that's the reason why she isn't tired," Mrs Fordyce thought, as she calmly put out the lamp. "Ellen is the most agreeable of companions, to my mind ; but I know young people like a change."

Miss Fordyce's reply to this request of her cousin Constantia's brought a gleam of sunshine to that young lady's heart. "If Stephanie puts the pressure on, ma's sure to give way, because of the ogress of our house," Connie had said to herself when the thought of an appeal to Aunt Ellen's pity first came into her mind ; "and Stephanie is always ready to be good-natured." And so, most unfortunately, as events proved, Stephanie showed herself in this instance.

The reply was a letter to Mrs Cornwell furthering Constantia's wishes in a full and ingenious way. Stephanie took it for granted that the intentions of Fleet Rectory with regard to this ball were unaltered. She gave no hint of a knowledge

of that broken-heartedness under which Mrs Cornwell was labouring at the time ; and she asked for information relative to her cousin's dresses, in order that she might take them wreaths and bouquets to match, a present from Aunt Ellen. The belief expressed, together with the bait held out, was too much for the woman, mother, and wanton of all things that were offered. Mrs Cornwell gave the note to Boadicea with an order to the effect that she was to answer it favourably as to the request, and fully as to the wreaths. "I resign myself to going," she said, "now Stephanie has set her mind on it, but I foresee all kinds of annoyances."

"It is disagreeable, but, as you say, ma, there's no help for it now."

"I believe Ellen has put Miss Stephanie up to it to annoy me," Mrs Cornwell said, peevishly.

"I shouldn't wonder," her daughter

replied. Boadicea cared very little for either the motive or the manner of it so long as the pressure was put on in such a way that she went to the ball after all. She did not like her sister's engagement; but that was a light evil in comparison to losing this grandly organized county festivity.

"And if Aunt Ellen's been spiteful, she shall pay for her spite. I shall have trails of small ferns and cyclamen to loop up my skirt with now, as she's going to give us the flowers, and I know they're expensive. It's disgustingly mean of her," the young lady continued, "not to have given us dresses for it." Which speech, on the whole, was ungrateful on the part of Miss Cornwell, albeit it is an accepted fact that from those who give much, much shall be expected.

There was much sound satisfaction in Constantia's mind when the result of her

appeal to her unfailing ally, Stephanie Fordyce, was made known. There would be communion with her lover at that ball, communion of a more untrammelled order than she was permitted to enjoy at home, for though her engagement was suffered to stand, Mr Brown treated the home of his betrothed something after the manner of a hostile camp, and abstained from adventuring his person in it with what she deemed properly attentive frequency. Her sister scoffed at the spirit of abstinence he manifested, and though Constantia defended him by saying, "Of course no man would come into a room full of blank looks when he could stay out of it," though she said this, the scoffing irritated her. Added to the not unnatural desire to see him and "have out" the subject of her home trials and his evasion of them, was the equally reasonable wish to revolve before the eyes of the many who had been calculating her



matrimonial chances kindly and keenly for the last six years, on the arm of a man whose revolvings in the dancing world were noticeable things, and it would be pleasant to watch the leaven of the fact of his having asked her to be his wife, working. In addition to these pure and undefiled sources of contentment, there was great joy in the thought of her dress and the trimmings that Stephanie would be sure to select. It is great nonsense to talk of the "first" ball-dress as being a sort of light that ne'er will shine again on life's dull stream; it is always the last or the one that she is going to have, around which the heart-strings of a woman twine themselves most fondly. The "first" is out of fashion, consequently a thing she wonders she could ever have worn! Bless her constancy!

## CHAPTER IV.

## DORA'S DESIGNS.

THE glossy-haired mistress of Donne Place was getting terribly tired of the life of perfect propriety to which circumstances were now condemning her. It was an amusement that soon palled upon her, that one she had entered upon with avidity when Fanny Conway was there, of making herself agreeable to her husband. Dora could be most tenderly, fascinatingly attentive to him when there were men present who might possibly experience jealous disgust at the sight of such tender, fascinating attention, — or when women were by to be rendered envious by the

exhibition of the return he always promptly made. But when they were alone, the path of duty was not adorned by any of those little arts and graces with which she was wont to garnish it before people.

Just about this time the old Bishop of the diocese died "full of years and honours, and universally regretted," the papers said. And the papers spoke as truthfully as is customarily the case. He had been in a state of semi-imbecility for several years. His normal state was one of good-will towards all men and an intense desire to let every one alone; and when he had chronic fits of interference his advisers had utterly disregarded them. Therefore it is not to be wondered at that individually he should have been well liked in the diocese, and that all who knew him should, when the tidings of his death were wafted abroad, pull, for half-a-second, a face one half-inch longer than before.

His Chaplain pretty well expressed the feelings of the clergy on the subject. "Bless me ! gone at last ; Staunton will be the man, I hope," he said when his servant gave him the *Times*, the *Guardian*, and the tidings that the " Bishop had just been found dead in his bed — was thought to have gone like a lamb." And Mrs Donne may be accepted as the mouth-piece of society.

"The Bishop is dead," she wrote to one of her correspondents, "a good thing too, for his dowdy wife made the palace a dull hole ; and Dr Staunton is to have it, they say, and if he does there'll be another good house in the county."

The death of the Bishop, or rather the probable preferment of Dr Staunton, caused commotion in the hearts of other actors on the stage of this story. The coming man and Mr Brown, the curate of Fleet, had known each other in former days, and

there had been as great a friendship and as great an intimacy between them as ever can exist between a man on whose brow the shadow of a mitre is cast by anticipation, and one whose place is still at the very bottom of the ladder up which the other has climbed. Now that the shadow of the mitre was better defined than ever, Dr Staunton wrote to Mr Brown, and magnificently recalled his friendship and intimacy, and hinted that, in the event of a no very improbable change taking place in his own state, he would wish to have Mr Brown near him. "There would be a satisfaction in having the companionship of such a fellow-labourer in the Lord's vineyard," he wrote first. But he scratched the sentence out, remembering that they had not been wont to hold converse of this kind in the bye-gone days.

But though he scratched that sentence out, his letter was quite kind and en-

couraging enough to justify Sydney Brown in looking upon the Chaplaincy as his own should Dr Staunton get the Bishopric. Their views on religious matters marched ; and what, in the case of a man like Dr Staunton, was infinitely more to the purpose, their tastes and habits in their secular moments marched also. They had travelled together, they had written together, and Sydney Brown's arguments in defence of his senior's views had always hammered the nail down harder, and been admitted both by the original propounder and the opponents to hammer them down harder. Nearly thirty years more had passed over the head of the dignitary of the Church than over that of the well-favoured, clever young clerk's. But between some men this barrier of years is not felt as such. Dr Staunton was void of patriarchal ambition. He was a keen, clever, rising man, and he desired to

head a party of men like himself, and to be looked up to by them on account of those qualities and the success attending them alone. He did not want to be revered for his age, but for his opinions, and the way he had of putting and supporting and defending them.

“I hear from Connie that you have very good hopes of being given something good if Staunton gets it?” Mr Cornwell said to his curate on the Sunday morning following the Bishop’s death, when they were putting their surplices on in the vestry, “it” in these days always being understood to apply to the vacant Bishopric.

Now Mr Brown had in the hour of his first elation confided the spirit of Dr Staunton’s letter to Miss Constantia. But he had not counted on having his hopes and expectations canvassed while they were still liable to defeat. So now when Mr Cornwell told him what Connie had said,

and told him in an interrogatory tone, Mr Brown felt annoyed.

"Oh," he said carelessly, "women are always sanguine, you know; it's their good-heartedness makes them so, no doubt. I was very glad to hear that there was a probability of Dr Staunton getting it, for there's nothing of the old woman about him."

"But he has written to you?"

"Yes, saying that now he has fallen across me again he hopes we shall work together as of old. It's uncommonly flattering from such a man as Dr Staunton, that reminder, but it doesn't refer to church preferment at all."

"What does it refer to, then?"

"I fought under his banner on a question of Theology some time since, and very possibly I may do it again."

"The less he dabbles in Theology in his old way if he gets this, the better, I think," Mr Cornwell said, preparing to



leave the vestry. He remembered now the fight to which Mr Brown had referred ; and he also remembered that Dr Staunton's views had been startling, not to say alarming.

But though Mr Brown affected this light belief in something good for himself eventuating from Dr Staunton's promotion, his hopes in reality were high, and he was well justified in their being so. That the new Bishop would strive to form a strong party of his own immediately around himself on his coming to the See, there could be no doubt. And Sydney Brown knew himself to be one of the best and most judicious partisans of that party. There was nothing of the "old woman" about Dr Staunton, as Mr Brown had truly said. Where he could, he would substitute young blood for the feebly running old,—young blood that would circulate freely

through the land, throbbing in unison with his own pulses and making them felt.

Dr Staunton was a prompt, energetic man, and there was no dallying with time where he was concerned. In a few days, anxieties, hopes, and fears were set at rest. A handsomely appointed brougham, drawn by a large, powerful, nearly thoroughbred horse, pulled up one evening at the door of the palace, and from it stepped Dr Staunton, now Bishop of St Odulph's.

The appearance of the horse alone marked well the difference between the new man and the old. In place of the pair of black, fleshy, respectable quadrupeds that had been wont to convey the venerable deceased about in solemn stupid splendour, there stood now before the episcopal residence an aught but orthodox horse. He was a long bay, without a bit of superfluous flesh or leather on him,

and the pace at which he had come along the street had been a wonder and a shame to the inhabitants. He looked in their eyes as little like a Bishop's horse as the spare, active man who descended rapidly from the brougham, and walked with a decided but not particularly imposing step through the doorway, looked like a Bishop. If any one were capable of waking St Odulph's from its deep dream of peace, this its new spiritual king was. St Odulph's opened its eyes widely with surprise, and he was not likely to suffer it to close them again.

He was as much like a Bishop according to the ideas of those who had founded them on a constant contemplation and admiration of the man who had preceded him, as the slinging-actioned bay was like a Bishop's horse. But for all that, the votaries of progress affirmed that he was the right man in the right place—as if

such a concatenation ever did occur; and there was some truth in this, for the See of St Odulph's was not innocent of clever inquiring men, waiting only for a leader and an outlet, and Dr Staunton was just the man to lead them on to the finding of such outlet.

A cold, collected man, with iron-grey hair and iron-grey eyes, with a shrewd, clever, expressive countenance, and the most thorough control over the muscles of the same, he was not one whose views and intentions could be easily fathomed by satellites. But still the whisper soon got bruited abroad that he meant to make great changes. Men said that one of these changes would be the cashiering of the late Bishop's Chaplain from the post, and the institution of Sydney Brown in his stead.

He was not a married man, and he came down to take up his residence unhampered by any female relative. "He

will surely have a sister or some relation to live with him, and do the honours of the palace?" those who were interested in the palatial hospitality and those who were not alike said. But he either did not hear these suggestive sayings, or he did not heed them. His home previously had been comfortable enough, lacking nothing, in fact, that man could desire, and he saw no reason for making it uncomfortable now because it was a palace. So the household was organized, and well organized too!—for a bachelor alone.

The late Bishop had been advertised to preach a sermon at Radley on the Sunday fortnight after he was buried, on behalf of the mission for familiarizing some tribe of innocent savages with the Bible, blankets, and British brandy. One Bishop being as good as another for such a purpose, Dr Staunton declared that he would carry out his predecessor's intention, and when Mrs.

Donne heard of it, she resolved to relieve the Rector's wife of the pleasing but oppressive privilege of providing a midday refection for the great man.

Mrs Donne, in addition to her many other admirable qualities, had this one also, of a vaulting ambition. Bishops did not appear in Radley every day, and this one had a name that sounded, quite independent of his rank in the Church. She, like most other women, had a liking for men who set their mark on the times. It might be fame or it might be only popularity, she did not very much care which, so long as it was one or the other.

Had it been only a Bishop who was to preach this sermon, Mrs Donne would have had an ache in her head on the occasion, and have avoided the possibility of being bored, by remaining away. But he was a man who had been talked about before he was a prelate. He had been

violently praised and virulently abused ; and when a man is these things, there must be a something about him that the majority do not possess. Mrs Donne remembered the violence and virulence when she heard of the nearly true-bred bay with the slinging trot ; she turned those things, together with the horse, over in her mind. And when she heard that he was coming to Radley, she resolved that her husband should call at the palace, and that his Lordship should be asked to luncheon at Donne Place.

“ The Rectory stable is draughty,” Dora said ; “ it would be a good plan for him to have his horse put up in our stables and for us to drive him over to Radley—it would break the journey for the horse too, wouldn’t it, Lyster ? ”

“ Yes, but I don’t know how the Wallaces will like our trying to take possession of him in this way, Dora ? ”

"Oh, nonsense," she said; "do invite him, Lyster. Call, and then write. Where should he come but to Donne Place when he comes to Radley? at any rate, ask him."

"I don't think he'll come, it will be an idle compliment, for it's a sort of understood thing on such occasions, I believe, that the clergyman of the parish should receive him."

"Lyster, he's not the sort of man to do 'understood things,' it would be so nice to know him."

"What has given you this sudden desire to do all honour to the Church?"

"Now, it's not that, and you know that it's not, very well," she said.

"I don't want a Bishop or any other man to think I want to force an acquaintance upon him, Dora. In the nature of things, it is not likely that, if I don't put myself in his way, we should ever come



across one another; and I don't want to put myself in his way."

"But, Lyster, if you would only just call; that would be only civility, you know. Why, if the Prince of Wales took up his abode in the neighbourhood you wouldn't put yourself out of the pale of your class by refusing to leave your card. It wouldn't be trying to force an acquaintance, it would only be paying him proper respect."

"There isn't the least occasion for a man like me, who has no Church interests or patronage, to pay that sort of respect to a bishop."

"Well, no, not to him 'as a bishop,' I grant that; but he's a celebrated man, and if any other celebrated man came down to the county and took up his station amongst us, you wouldn't make yourself singular by holding aloof from him, would you? waive all other than social considerations, and if you're afraid that he should imagine

you are too eager to know him, I'll make it clear to him that it was *my* wish you obeyed—*my* very earnest wish to know him; and as I am neither old, ugly, nor disagreeable, he'll be flattered at that, if I'm not mistaken."

"Don't exactly see the object of your flattering him by a display of your youth, beauty, and agreeability, being very humbly at his service," Mr Donne said; "however, as you like."

Of course it was as she liked, for Dora's heart was very warmly set upon this scheme, to which her husband had no aversion, nothing but a simple indifference. "As a rule, I didn't know you cared for 'clever men' more than you did for bishops," he said; "but what difference can it make to a little goose like yourself whether he has broken the teeth of half the theologians in the land with the nuts he has given them to crack or not?"

But though he called her a "little goose," she knew that he did not consider her one; and she knew also, and this was more to the purpose, that he meant to obey her behest. So she told him that she had used not to care for clever men, but she had caught the taste from him. Then she set about devising a new dress wherewith to adorn the occasion of the effort on behalf of the propagation of many things.

The card was left, and the invitation was sent and accepted. It seemed to the Bishop a matter of very small moment where his horse was stabled and himself refreshed on that Sunday morning to which Radley was looking forward with such anxiety. Besides, Mr Donne had a name and a position in the county, and as a man—well, I won't say "of," but who had been a great deal "in" the world, the Bishop, even had he given much thought to the matter, would have deemed it more

according to the fitness of things that he should put up at Donne Place instead of at the Rectory.

The late Bishop's Chaplain was going with him to Radley; and as he was sitting with Dr Staunton when the invitation arrived, it was handed to him with a courteous request that he would answer it favourably. The Bishop was far too proud and clever a man to play any small tricks of pompous superiority to his subordinates. It was only a few who were shrewd enough to detect how absolutely this quiet polite man did rule over them.

"Will you be good enough to say 'yes' for us both?" the Bishop said. "I suppose you know Mr Donne?"

Now the late Bishop's Chaplain's Chaplaincy was hanging by a hair at present, and he knew it, for he too had heard of Sydney Brown. Still he ventured to say,

"The Wallaces were hoping to see you at the Rectory."

Dr Staunton was not the man to put himself out for professional claims.

"This will be more convenient," he said. And then the Chaplain wrote an answer, the receipt of which made Dora very happy.

"I shall drive down to the Rectory and tell Mrs Wallace that the Bishop is coming here to luncheon, Lyster," she said, "it will be only kind to tell her, or she will make extensive preparations, she's just the woman to do it."

"You're a brave woman to go and deal your blow in person," he said laughing. "I believe it's viciousness made you so anxious to get him here, and disappoint Mrs Wallace. I'll go and order the ponies."

Mrs Donne laughed agreeably to herself while she was being dressed for the drive into Radley. It was not all vicious-

ness, as will be seen, against Mrs Wallace which made her desirous of securing the mighty guest, and discomfiting the Rector's wife. But still the thought of that probable discomfiture was very gratifying, for Mrs Wallace was a large, honest-hearted, exemplary wife and mother, who disapproved of Dora and Dora's propensities. And Dora knew that she so disapproved, and pretty Dora detested her.

Mrs Wallace was out in the garden tying up some dahlias and other late autumn flowers when Mrs Donne drove up. When pretty Dora reined her ponies up sharply, and her smart little tiger sprang round, and took up the proper Colossus of Rhodes' position at their heads, the clergyman's wife felt herself obliged to go up to the side of the phaeton in which the beautiful queen of the neighbourhood sat with the air of one who would give audience.

Mrs Donne was exquisitely dressed in a

mauve silk dress and mantle, over which last she wore a rich black lace collerette; her bonnet was of mauve silk also, and her gloves were of the same hue. Her bay ponies, too, were admirably groomed, and her little miniature mail phaeton was admirably appointed. Mrs Wallace was in an unbecoming morning dress, with gardening gloves on her hands, and a hat that did not suit her on her head. Usually, she dressed handsomely and well, but she was a woman who might not be careless in her toilet with impunity. This day she looked at a terrible disadvantage by the side of Mrs Donne.

Now this fact of being at a disadvantage as regards those externals that are—it is useless to deny it—dear to the heart of a woman, is apt to be subversive of amiability and composure. Mrs Wallace was a good-natured woman, but Dora's mauve silks, and Dora's sweet appearance in the same,

caused her (Mrs Wallace) to feel sour before the subject of the Bishop was mooted.

"I won't take you in from your garden," the pretty mistress of Donne Place said in her most bell-like tone. I only just drove in as I was passing; "it would be a pity to disturb you, because when the autumn rains come those dahlias will want their sticks."

"Oh, never mind the dahlias, Mrs Donne; pray walk in."

"No, not now, I'll come another day when you won't be gardening; we shall have so little fine weather for it now soon, that it would be a shame to stop you. How's Mr Wallace?"

"He's very well, thank you; in the parish as usual."

"Ah! looking over it, to see that all is well before the Bishop comes, I suppose?"

"The Bishop is not likely to look into the state of the parish when he does come.



Not but what I *trust* it would always be ready for inspection," Mrs Wallace replied stiffly, "but he is coming on Sunday, as perhaps you may have heard. Dr Staunton intends carrying out the intention of his predecessor most kindly."

"Oh! yes, to be sure," Mrs Donne replied carelessly. Then she went on in a casual kind of way, as if she had known the Bishop all her life. "Next Sunday, oh! yes, so it is, he is coming to lunch with us."

Now Mrs Wallace had fondly and firmly hoped that the Bishop would do them this grace that Mrs Donne had appropriated so lightly, and she did not hear that they were to be deprived of it without a pang in her innermost soul. But she exercised sufficient self-command to conceal from Mrs Donne all the agony that that blow inflicted. The lady in mauve saw that she of the unbecoming dress was pained, but she did not know how deeply.

"You have known the Bishop before, I suppose?" she said lightly. "*My* husband was at college with him, but perhaps he won't remember that now," the wife went on with a look in her eyes that belied her assertion. She did not believe that any one who had been at college with her husband could ever forget the fact, and such wifely faith surely deserves a kindly mention and a warm sympathy.

Mrs Donne rather desired to be credited with an acquaintanceship of some standing with the pundit who had gained the prelacy, so she abstained from answering the former part of Mrs Wallace's sentence, but the latter portion she politely recognized.

"I shall remind the Bishop of that circumstance on Sunday, Mrs Wallace," she said, holding out her hand to the aggrieved lady. "*Good-bye*, so glad to have seen you." And then she flicked her ponies

and drove off, leaving Mrs Wallace with a feeling of loathing and detestation against her late visitor in her mind and heart. The preparations for the Bishop's reception had already commenced, and Mrs Wallace felt outraged in every way.

The Sunday morning saw Mrs Donne surprisingly dressed even for her. She had risen with the resolution in her mind to ravish the taste of the man who was coming, if he possessed one atom of it. "I don't care a button for him as a bishop," Dora said candidly, when her husband laughed at the evident care she had bestowed in the selection of every adjunct that could set off her great natural beauty. "I don't care a button for him as a bishop; were he old and a bore, he might have gone on to the Rectory, and made happy the heart of that numskull of a woman."

There was truth in Dora's statement that she did not care for him as a bishop.

She took her stand on the broad ground of requiring every man's admiration. Had the exigencies of society permitted it, she would have striven equally hard to make miserable with unrequited love the heart of a burglar. But society, the rules of which pretty Dora was uncommonly careful never to infringe for any man, would not suffer this without remark. Therefore Mrs Donne spared the mob, and made havoc only amongst those whose conquest redounded to her honour and glory. It was not because he now held a high place in his profession, that Dora coveted the triumph of making Dr Staunton feel that she was a very fair woman indeed ; it was because he had the name of a *savant*, who, though no dreamer, but always thoroughly on the alert, was singularly indifferent to women's smiles, and cynically alive to their wiles.

Added to her insatiable love of coquet-

ry, she had another reason for wishing to make an intimacy with the new prelate that might be marked in the county, and especially in the cathedral town. Clerical society in a cathedral town is a sort of poverty-stricken court; it is dull and dreary, but still to be admitted into its innermost circle is a desirable thing, when one has the luck to dwell on the confines of it. It is dull and dreary, and rigidly respectable. The first two characteristics had made it odious to, and the last had caused it to taboo, brilliant Mrs Donne. And now that the new Bishop had come, brilliant Mrs Donne remembered the slight and the suspicion it had cast upon her, and was determined to make it shiver to its core.

People rarely get blamed for the worst of their actions, unless it comes to their committing murder or arson; so it is not to be accounted wonderful that the

Cerberus of St Odulph's should have snarled its horror and condemnation at a very venial brace of iniquities which Dora had committed. They—the clique of matrons of the cathedral close, whose dicta was no light thing in the land that lay around—had commenced looking glum at her, and had ceased to invite her to their ponderous parties, because she wore a hat with a crimson *coque*, when a bonnet would have been much “more ladylike and quieter,” they affirmed; and because at a hunt-ball she had danced every round dance with the handsomest man and best waltzer in the room. These were the worst sins they could allege against her with knowledge. But they gave a loose rein to their imaginations, and declared her with emphasis to be capable of anything.

Bright Dora knew it all—their censure and their sentence; and though she did not care for their society, she hated them for

excluding her from it. Dull, rigorous women though they were, infinitely bored as Mrs Donne always was in their presence, it nettled her that they should have dropped her, ousted her from their tedious *coterie*. And Dora was not one to be nettled with impunity.

So though the Bishop was singularly indifferent to woman's smiles, and cynically alive to her wiles as a rule, he was but a man, and he recognized in this instance that the first were sweet, and the second remarkably fascinating, and that both were designed to please him. Not a single reader need tremble for the honour of the Church—the Bishop was much too hard-headed to wear any woman's chains, and Dora far too intelligent to flirt at him. She made herself enchantingly agreeable during their drive to Radley. She told him frankly that if his predecessor had been alive to pour forth his platitudes she should have remained

away, and few men are impassive enough to be totally careless as to the opinion a charming clever woman has of their abilities, therefore this going to hear him was an implied compliment, that even the cool, shrewd Bishop felt. She was, he felt, a far more sympathetic and congenial hostess than Mrs Wallace would have been. For Mrs Wallace, at sight of Dora floating up the aisle by the side of the Bishop (who did not forget that he was a gentleman, and so precede her), grew rigid with wrath and red with resentment against the appropriator of the honour that should have been her own. But Dora did not flirt.

When they went back to luncheon at Donne Place, she, having heard the whisper also about Mr Brown, spoke about the Cornwells in a casual incidental way that was deliciously void of apparent design. "They're gifted with a special grace for rendering themselves ridiculous," she



said. "Mrs Cornwell has just had a severe trial, poor woman, so I ought not to say anything about her."

"What is her trial?" the Bishop asked.

"A contumacious curate — he won't wait upon her, and he won't alter the orthography of his name, and he will marry her daughter; isn't it a cruel case?"

"Marry her daughter!" (he was interested in this first mention of his friend's matrimonial prospects). "Ah! indeed; who's the rebel?"

"A Mr Brown," Dora said, looking as innocently up into the Bishop's face as if she had not heard a dozen times of Sydney Brown's partisanship for, and popularity with, this head of a new movement.

"Do you know him?"

"Yes," she replied, "and adore him in a ball-room. Don't use that as evidence against him," she continued quickly; "some

people have a prejudice against clergymen dancing."

"Don't be afraid," he replied laughing; he did not believe that either the frankness or the flashes of memory were real things, but he had no very stringent objection to small affectations that were harmless in themselves and put forth to please him.

"You have no prejudices," she said, with a sort of applauding rapture.

"Not of that sort, at any rate," he answered, and he smiled with a feeling of half amusement. He had marked the expression of horror and inquiry that was upon the face of the late Bishop's Chaplain when Mrs Donne said he had "no prejudices." It was the foreshadowing of a look that would come over a good many faces before he had done with them, he opined.

"Then do give your countenance to the ball on the 25th," Dora said.

"Balls are not at all in my line, Mrs Donne. Don't imagine I object to them though, if they amused me in the least I should go to them, but they do not amuse me."

She began to fear that he was not going to be amenable to this one request, upon his granting of which she had set her heart. Dora was not the kind of woman to go on pleading for a favour, which might eventually be refused to her before other people; therefore she changed the subject now, but she renewed it again when she was pointing out the view to him from the west window, while he was waiting for the fast-trotting horse to bring the brougham round.

"I am so disappointed that you will not accede to my request," she said. "I always like to have a great interest to look

forward to, and it would give a great interest to that ball on the 25th if I could look forward to your coming in for ten minutes."

He knew full well that she was flattering and trying to beguile him, but her little attempts were harmless and amusing, and he liked both her and her well-bred husband.

"Ten minutes! that is a very small return to make for your kindness of this morning. I shall do myself the honour of taking them from my usual avocations, and placing them at your disposal on the night of the 25th."

Then he departed, and while he was rolling back to St Odulph's, Dora went for a walk with her husband, and made the suggestion that it would be well to go over to St Odulph's on the 24th, and hire rooms at the hotel till the 26th.

you have such a touching faith in all that humbug. You do think that we are mighty fine people, now, don't you?"

"Well, Stephanie, I must say that I hope I am not ignorant of the claims of my family, and I didn't expect you to scoff at them; we're the same stock, remember."

"Yes, I remember that whenever I think about it at all, but, upon my word, I don't see the necessity for brandishing the stock, as you call it, aloft in this way and making it obnoxious; and in such a case as this you ought only to remember the position as being the cause of Connie having been brought in contact with Mr Brown. By-the-by, what has made you moderate your views? you liked him so much at first."

"Ah! but he has been such a bone of contention in the family lately, that I find him odious now; and then Connie is so

disgustingly elated and satisfied with the arrangement, that it's enough to make one question the cause she has. I believe she is only anxious to go to this ball, in order that she may flourish about with him and show people that she is 'engaged,' as if anybody couldn't be engaged." (Miss Cornwell appeared quite annoyed at such a foolish doubt even arising.)

"Flourish about! no, that would be bad taste; but just say, now, would you feel anything like shame at showing it if you were going to be married to him? You have heard about the other bone of contention in our family?"

"About Allondale you mean?"

"Yes."

"Have you seen her? What is she like, pretty?"

"Lovely; mamma and I called on her the other day."

"And how do you like her? do you

## CHAPTER V.

## MRS DONNE'S HOUR OF TRIUMPH.

STEPHANIE arrived at Fleet Rectory on the 24th. Having selected the wreaths of ferns and cyclamen with great judgment, she received as warm a welcome from Boadicea as was accorded her by the young lady whose ends she had furthered in the matter of the ball.

"You've heard of Connie's engagement I suppose, dear?" Miss Cornwell said to her cousin the moment they were alone, "isn't it an affair?"

Miss Cornwell asked if it wasn't an affair quite contemptuously; a stranger might have been deluded into believing

that she had been guileless all the days of her life of endeavouring to compass some such affair for herself. But Stephanie was not a stranger, she knew better.

“Yes, a most satisfactory one. Shall I see him here to-day?”

“No, he doesn’t seem to care much for Connie’s society now he has proposed to her. There’s no accounting for taste. Connie likes him, and doesn’t mind his neglect. I shouldn’t have liked either.”

“Then it’s a fortunate thing he didn’t set his heart on your doing so; I’m very glad that he fell in love with Connie.”

“Oh! as to falling in love, there has not been much of that on his part, I’m thinking. Connie liked him, and showed that she liked him, and of course that was very flattering to him from any one in our position.”

Stephanie laughed. “It’s delicious, absolutely delicious to hear you, Boadicea;



you have such a touching faith in all that humbug. You do think that we are mighty fine people, now, don't you ? ”

“ Well, Stephanie, I must say that I hope I am not ignorant of the claims of my family, and I didn't expect you to scoff at them ; we're the same stock, remember.”

“ Yes, I remember that whenever I think about it at all, but, upon my word, I don't see the necessity for brandishing the stock, as you call it, aloft in this way and making it obnoxious ; and in such a case as this you ought only to remember the position as being the cause of Connie having been brought in contact with Mr Brown. By-the-by, what has made you moderate your views ? you liked him so much at first.”

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"Flourish about! no, that would be bad taste; but just say, now, would you feel anything like shame at showing it if you were going to be married to him? You have heard about the other bone of contention in our family?"

"About Allondale you mean?"

"Yes."

"Have you seen her? What is she like, pretty?"

"Lovely; mamma and I called on her the other day."

"And how do you like her? do you

think there's anything queer about her?" Miss Cornwell asked eagerly; she did not exactly hope that something horrible might have been discovered relative to Miss Conway. But still had such discovery been made, there would have been more pleasure than pain to Boadicea in analyzing it.

"How do I like her? now, Boadicea, what woman ever had the smallest foundation for liking or disliking another at first sight? I thought her hair and her dress and manners beautiful, and her face quite pretty enough to accord with them; and if you mean by anything 'queer,' a slight touch of madness, I should say there is nothing."

"Dreadfully cautious you are about what you say, Stephanie. Now I always was as frank as the day," Miss Cornwell said. Then having failed to elicit an opinion that was derogatory either to Lord Allondale's betrothed or to Mr Brown, Bo-

dicea left Stephanie to her own devices for a time.

But Stephanie knew that the peace was a hollow one, and liable to rupture at any moment. The intercourse that had already passed between Mrs Cornwell and herself had been of a limited nature; it had, in fact, consisted solely of "How do you do, Aunt Selina?" and "Glad to see you, Stephanie, my child; I can't say I hope you'll enjoy yourself here, for I don't see under existing circumstances how anybody can." This was all that had been said between them as yet. But Stephanie knew how dearly her Aunt Selina loved to recite her woes to a fresh ear. To tell what she called the "whole of it" always gave Mrs Cornwell balmy sensations. She told a story unctuously, as it were, in an involved manner truly, and occasionally with much uncalled-for precipitation, and again with a tedious minuteness that did

not further it at all, in a way in fact that made it an appalling thing to listen to. But no one escaped her stories when she had one to tell, and Stephanie felt that there was a fine big one prepared for her as soon as she fell into her aunt's power, alone.

That moment came all too soon, Stephanie resigned herself to the situation, and attempted to look interested when Mrs Cornwell commenced.

"I suppose you've heard Connie's version of this affair, my dear; but I should just like you to hear all about it, so if you'll come into my room where we can have our chat without being interrupted, I will tell you."

Stephanie just gave her wings a feeble flutter. "O, aunt, I think I know it all," she said; "I needn't trouble you to tell me, it's so tedious to tell a thing over twice."

"Not at all," Mrs Cornwell answered quickly, "it's a great fault with young

people of the present day, that they consider everything 'tedious.'" So Stephanie was conveyed into the victim-chamber, and Mrs Cornwell proceeded to mangle her niece's nerves under the wheels of her own story-telling chariot.

"Now I'll tell you all about it," Mrs Cornwell repeated; and at the words Stephanie's blood curdled in her veins, and coagulated round her heart, and no wonder, for if there is one thing more odious than another, it is being compelled to hear 'all about it' when you would rather not.

Miss Fordyce was a charitably disposed Christian on ordinary occasions, but her toleration and charity were taxed a little too severely now. She could not help wishing that Mr Brown's and Connie's young love had been nipped in the bud, instead of having bloomed into sufficient importance to have "all about it" told to

her — long-suffering Stephanie Fordyce. Mrs Cornwell told her story,—the tale of her maternal rage and disappointment, and womanly detestation of a man who, after disregarding her claims, had the impertinence to aspire to her daughter, with a prolix irrelevancy that was maddening. Mrs Cornwell was a gentlewoman, and I, her historian, believe that what is a fact about horses holds good with regard to women, that the best bred are the *best* emphatically. But Mrs Cornwell's demeanour, whenever she laboured under excitement, was really enough to shake any one's faith in this belief. She was at such times a wearing, odious, unmitigated nuisance. She said things over twice, and emphasized her words strongly, in order to make them impressive, and she gave the prominent position in her sentences to the least important thing, in the most blunder-headed and irritating manner. Her recital was

full of "I saids" and "you knows" and other vain repetitions. It is always a depressing thing to be told all about anything—at least, I find that there are uncommonly few things in the world about which I care sufficiently to desire full and complete information. When it comes to hearing all about the love affair of a plump, affectionate, but uninteresting young cousin, from the angry lips of an illogical old woman, it is worse than depressing, and so Stephanie found it.

It must be confessed that Mrs Cornwell displayed indomitable courage in the telling of her stories. It never daunted her in the least, that her hearer would remain absolutely quiescent, and make no sign of an interest of any sort throughout the whole of it. Long after blank weariness and utter woe made their appearance in the countenances of her dejected listeners, she would go on pouring out her words with



untiring volubility. She did not want answers, for there was a lack of all argument in her tirades, and indignation would have vexed her had any one disputed those creatures of her own brain which she gave forth as facts. No ; all she required was to be heard—she felt that a subject gained greatly in importance when she had talked it over and told all about it.

This faith in the power of words is, I believe, a thoroughly feminine characteristic. I do not mean that all women have it, but very many have. You never find that a man credits a statement one bit the more because some other person, whom he has no reason for supposing to be better informed on the subject than himself, has “said” something about it. But women, excellent, amiable, practical women, will believe, or, at any rate, attach importance to anything on the authority of any man’s spoken word. “So-and-so” has said that

things look black on the Continent ; or that there will be an eclipse of the sun during the whole of the ensuing month ; or that Louis Napoleon has condemned his wife to a diet of stale eggs ; or that violent exercise immediately after a heavy dinner is subversive of the law of digestion ; or something equally original or probable. Admirable women hear these things in the unaccountable way some women have of getting abominable stupid platitudes said to them, and though they " don't believe them," they say " oh, of course not," they keep them in their minds and repeat in a wordy way. It is a shocking thing not to go to church three times every Sunday, because Mr Smith said it was. It is equally shocking not to eat meat three times a day, because Mr Bolus says it is. They sedulously disclaim anything like originality of thought, deeming the old paths safer and surer, or rather not thinking about them at

all, but just drifting into words when they feel the call to speak, with the blindest disregard of how hideously wearing those words may be to their hearers.

"It does one good to speak of a trouble," Mrs Cornwell said, wiping her eyes when she had concluded; or rather, when Stephanie hoped that she had concluded, and, acting on the hope, was trying to edge out of the room.

"Ah! well, so I have heard before," the young lady replied; "but I never found that it did me any good when I have been in trouble. I have always infinitely preferred to let the subject alone."

Mrs Cornwell had a profound distaste to the unconventional truths to which Stephanie was wont to give utterance; so now she said sharply,

"Well, my dear, of course I am nothing but a weak old woman, but in my day we were not taught to vaunt our self-

reliance and think *yewman* sympathy a contemptible thing."

Stephanie held her peace.

"Of course it's very *weak*, quite out of date, anything of the kind," Mrs Cornwell went on, with splenetic tearfulness; "but I do think that you need not deride a broken-hearted mother's attempt to soothe herself in—the—only—way." Mrs Cornwell went off into broken English and copious floods of tears for awhile, during which Stephanie waited very patiently and very silently.

"I only said I never took to that sort of comfort myself, Aunt Selina," she said, presently, with a laugh in her eyes; "and I was going to add," she went on, opening the door and preparing to flee the room before Mrs Cornwell could return her parting shot,—“and I was going to add that in this case I can believe that you find alleviation in very little. The sorrow to be

alleviated is such a mere trifle, that I shouldn't wonder in a few days if you feel ashamed of ever having thought it one."

It was well for Constantia that she who uttered this speech was Aunt Ellen's pet, otherwise the Ball of the 25th would have been ungraced by the presence of the party from Fleet Rectory, and Connie's heart was very firmly set upon going to it, and revolving in the mazy dance with Mr Sydney Brown.

He came up in the evening and walked about the rectory grounds with the three girls for a time, and Stephanie, after a little talk that could hardly be called conversation with him, fell into the folly afresh of wondering over again what had caused him to find his fate in Constantia Cornwell. "He is very fond of her, and why?" she thought, as they sauntered along in the damp air, and Mrs Cornwell railed at them

from the window for remaining in the same.

"How shall you go, Sydney?" Connie asked after a short silence.

"Go where?"

"Why, to St Odulph's to-morrow; of course, if mamma was like anybody else she would give you a seat in the carriage."

"She'd be unlike anybody else if she did, Connie," Stephanie said, "considering there will be four ladies to go."

"Oh! ah! to be sure. Well, how shall you go, Sydney?"

"Put my horse in the trap and drive over. I'm going to dine with the Bishop."

Constantia's heart swelled with pride—her father never dined with the Bishop. And this new Bishop was a greater man than those who had gone before him. Her heart swelled with pride, and yet a moment

after a reflection came across her mind, and her heart collapsed again.

"Oh, dine with the Bishop? but you won't be late?—now pray don't be late, Sydney."

"No, no, not a bit of it," he replied. "Your mother is sure not to troop in with you all till ten, and I shall be there before you. I will meet you."

"You must be there before ten, then," Connie said. Then she went on and endeavoured to impress him with a conviction that he had better be there early, or she might be so sought after as to render his gaining her when he came a work of labour and difficulty. She did not put it in precisely those words, but that was the gist of what she implied.

"Very well, I'll be there before ten." Then he refused her invitation to go in to tea, and took his leave; and when

he was gone Stephanie made Miss Constantia very happy by praising him.

“You must let me have one gallop with him, Connie. I remember when I was here before, and he was new, we all fell a little in love with his paces. You must be merciful in your strength, and tell me that I may count on one dance with a man who does it splendidly, and isn’t a booby at the same time.”

Connie was most graciously merciful in her strength, and agreed to Stephanie’s proposition in a way that showed that she did think that it would be an act of grace on her part to allow it. She liked it to be taken for granted that it would be optional with her whether or not Mr Sydney Brown teetotummed about the room with another woman. She believed it to be so herself.

“It will be very bad taste if he dances



much with her, won't it?" Miss Cornwell whispered to Stephanie. Stephanie, who, kind-hearted as she was, was rather bored with the subject and the ceaseless speculations, replied, without giving much thought to her answer, its meaning or effect,—

"Oh, I don't know, I should dance with him all the night if I were Connie."

Fleet was only ten miles from St Odulph's,—merely a delightful little drive to a country ball, if those who are boxed up together in a carriage are on amiable terms with each other, and have on their company manners of fictitious hilarity and affable satisfaction. But Mrs Cornwell on this occasion had no such manners at her disposal, therefore there was no hilarity, real or affected, and the sole beam of satisfaction was on Boadicea's face as she remarked that her dress was getting less crumpled in the course of transit to the

scene of action than those of her sister and cousin, which might be unamiable, but was excessively natural on the part of Boadicea.

But this lack of all effort on the part of the majority to beguile the weary way made the long drive appear all its length. "One needs a good deal to repay one for coming so far, eh?" Connie said to Miss Fordyce, when they were landed in the ante-room to the ball-room. As Connie asked it, she shook out her skirts, and glanced with complacency at the reflection of her bonnie face and battering-ram wreath in a glass, with an expression, that pervaded not her face alone but her figure also, of thorough reliance on herself having that "good deal" which should repay her for the solemnly stupid drive.

"There's Mrs Donne," Connie whispered eagerly to Stephanie, as a lady floated by. And Stephanie turned quickly to look

at the "evil genius of Denis Donne's life."

She did not look like the evil genius of anybody's life, as she walked along radiant in her perfect beauty and her perfect adornment of it. There was no high wreath to mar the symmetry of it on her beautiful little head; nor were there any distorting bows or disfiguring false braids. Her own glossy dark locks were just fastened with a diamond-headed arrow in a complication of plaits at the back of her head, and in front immediately over the right temple there glittered a diamond star.

Freely about her pliant, gloriously rounded figure there floated an atmosphere of white *tulle*. Other women stood in the midst of countless hundreds of yards of this material, but they none of them achieved the same result. Perhaps this was due to the fact of her having sent to Paris for her toilette, and paying forty

pounds for a compilation of *tulle* and tips of marabout feathers alone. However that might be, the result was unquestionably superior to anything anybody else had achieved. Now this truth was quickly felt, and Dora was not liked the better for it.

She was fired on this night with the desire to give the decorous women of St Odulph's, who had reprobated her silently, cause for those cool looks of theirs which had angered her. She was determined to show them that their Bishop—the dust off whose boots they were ready to wipe—bowed to her sway and owned her charm. And her desire and determination inspired her. Stephanie felt that Dora might be the fate of any man's life, for good or ill, just as she willed, who might chance to see her looking as she did now.

Mrs Cornwell had chosen to come before ten o'clock—some time before ten o'clock, in fact, therefore Mr Brown's not being

there to meet her did not strike Constantia as being anything but a slightly disappointing thing. But when ten o'clock, and even ten minutes past arrived, and confusion reigned in the room by reason of two hundred people endeavouring to waltz at once, Connie felt more than slight disappointment; and her mamma and sister were good enough not to suffer concealment of the same to prey upon her damask cheek.

"Really! if *this* is a specimen of the way Mr Brown intends treating you in *public*," said the one, and,

"Connie, you *cannot* make yourself ridiculous any longer by refusing to dance with anybody else, because Mr Brown doesn't come and keep his engagement."

"It was no engagement," poor Connie said at last, when sorely driven and irritated by the considerate pins that were being stuck into her, "only I thought that

he was—that I was—that we were to dance the first together.”

“ Old-fashioned nonsense,” Boadicea observed sharply, “ pray don’t make yourself a laughing-stock any longer.” Then poor Connie succumbed to circumstances and her sister; and went off with a heavy heart, and a step rendered the same through annoyance, to a secluded corner of the room where a couple were wanted in a quadrille.

It is a very odious thing to be kidnapped and conveyed to a corner in this way, and compelled to go through the bewildering intricacies of a quadrille when you are momentarily expecting the advent of a person whose skill in revolving to rapid music is a noticeable thing, and whose glories and triumphs you are confidently expecting to share. It is a very odious thing, and Connie felt it to be a very odious thing, and to think that unless

things altered very much for the better before long, that she would be one of those whose efforts to come to this ball would be horribly repaid by the events of it.

The quadrille ended—as all our woes do in time; and a well-meaning man asked Connie for the next, which was, as he took an opportunity of informing her, “A stunning gallop, and he knew it well, —danced it constantly at the Woolwich quarterlies” (which was a story, but that is nothing). When they were half-way down their first excursion from a corner across the room in order to start with effect, Constantia became conscious of a little extra excitement, and looking up she saw that a group of gentlemen had just entered, and were paying a very obvious homage to beautiful Mrs Donne.

Conspicuous amongst the group was the Bishop, and by his side was Sydney Brown.

She just paused in front of the chaperone's divan to point out the cause of why he had been late, to her mamma.

"You see?" she said triumphantly, "of course he could not leave the Bishop, as the Bishop was coming."

"Oh, I see—and who said anything about his coming?" Mrs Cornwell replied; "I never cared, *I'm* sure, whether he came or not."

"And now he doesn't seem to be able to leave Mrs Donne, look, Connie," Boadicea whispered, directing her sister's attention to the current conduct of her heart's choice in the kindest way.

Mrs Donne had her triumph in that hour, or rather in those few minutes during which the Bishop stayed. He had promised Mrs Donne that he would come to please her, and he kept his promise; he came to please her, and he did not trouble



his head about any one else, which was just what Mrs Dorne desired that all men who were observed at all should do. He had singled Mrs Dorne out from the crowd directly he entered. Indeed, she had taken care that he should not experience great difficulty on that score, and he had walked straight up to her, and reminded her that he was there according to her wish, in a way that was delightful to her, especially when she saw that St Odolph's saw and heard and trembled. After that the Bishop said a few sentences of civility to some other people, and then returned to the Dornes, and made his parting speeches to Dora. While he was making what he intended to be his parting speech, Dora dexterously conveyed to him her wish that he would walk down the extreme length of the room, nominally to look at a very beautiful and tasteful arrangement of rare flowers, the major portion of which had

been sent from Donne Place. And he, always remembering that he was a gentleman as well as a Bishop, acceded to her half-request with his usual quick decision, and offering her his arm he convoyed the most outrageous flirt in the county through the ranks of the scandalized.

The Bishop said something to Sydney Brown as he moved off, which compelled Sydney Brown to follow his footsteps in order to answer him, and forbade that seeking of Constantia Cornwell which he had already delayed too long for her peace of mind. Fair Mrs Donne, judging from what she saw that the talk of the intimacy had been no mere idle gossip, strove to absorb Sydney Brown into the conversation which was flattering to him, considering the Bishop was still by.

The fact was, that the clerical was the most important element in the room, and Dora knew it. Now she was one who if

the King of the country were not very much at her service would have his prime minister; and if the best days of his prime minister were past, perennial prime ministers not being everywhere, Dora would take the first favourite. This was her usual practice, and she was true to it to-night, and took Mr Sydney Brown, that is to say, she took his attention, and when Dora once had anything of the kind she tried and rarely failed to keep it.

The Bishop did not linger long among the flowers; metal more attractive was awaiting him at home in the shape of a tough disquisition in one of the most orthodox of publications on the enormity of his elevation to the vacant see. This the Bishop was resolved to answer in a way that should make the disquisitor in question sorry for what he had said.

So when he had given Mrs Donne this crowning glory of a triumphant prome-

nade, and had looked at the floral trophy, he withdrew from the scene, and then it was that Dora brought her battery to bear upon Mr Brown. The young curate was not the rose, but he had been near it; its chiefest fragrance had been shed for him, for he had dined and come with the Bishop, and he was mentioned as a rising man.

Mrs Donne adored success,—all women do, though some will not acknowledge to the weakness,—she adored success, and cared very little about Connie Cornwell's engagement. So she held him in the chains of her converse till Constantia was sick with divers sensations; and when he did finally break from the besieging beauty and make his way to the side of his betrothed, he found her incapable through jealousy, poor girl, of making herself agreeable, as the beaming, blooming, brilliant woman whom he had just quitted had done.

## CHAPTER VI.

## PUBLIC OPINION IS AGAINST MRS DONNE.

THE sorrows of others are easily borne, and slights to others are readily overlooked. Stephanie Fordyce, though she was far from entertaining kindly feelings towards Denis Donne's step-mother, did not deem that there was anything unpardonably outrageous in Mr Brown's dancing with, and superficial devotion to, her. "I have booked Mrs Donne for three or four waltzes," he had said when he had first come up to the Cornwell party, "she is insatiable as regards round dances, you know."

"It seems to me that you share her

sentiments," Constantia said, looking at his card, and Constantia said it crossly. She could have well endured that he should have apparently devoted himself to Stephanie, or indeed to almost any other girl in the room,—she feared none of them. But not to Mrs Donne! no! not to Mrs Donne, for she had the name of being insatiable about other things besides dancing.

"I was let in to asking her so many times, because—well, I hardly know how, but I *was* let in. You know I'd rather dance with you, Connie," and then he took her off, and they performed a mournful quadrille together.

"Mrs Donne is a much better figure for that kind of thing than you are, Connie, but it's scarcely becoming on Mr Brown's part to mark the difference," Boadicea kindly observed to her sister some time after, when the pair under notice revolved for an instant before their eyes.

Now her figure was a very tender point with Constantia Cornwell, for, as I have said before, she was rather fat, and she objected to any mention of the fact being made. Generally Miss Cornwell respected this favourite aversion of her sister's, but she could not hold her hand where Sydney Brown was concerned.

"I do wish you would not so constantly watch us both, Boadicea," she said pettishly. "You said a great deal about its being very bad taste if we danced together much, and now we're not dancing together you say it's unbecoming on his part; it makes me wish, goodness knows what."

In truth, it did make her wish very fervently that she was not engaged to him at all. She had not the least objection to playing martyr to a select audience while she believed him staunch. But she did not like to play the part here in the ball-

room at St Odulph's, while he disported himself hilariously with another man's wife.

"The odious, detestable flirt," she said almost tearfully to Stephanie; and Stephanie replied,

"She isn't odious, and as to her being detestable, if she's that you'll be all the pleasanter to him by comparison when he has worked off those dances that she 'let him into,' as he calls it. I believe it too, she is just the sort of woman to make a man feel that he must ask her whether he wishes to do so or not. I shouldn't mind it a bit if I were you, Connie."

"Yes you would," Connie answered. "I don't think he means anything, of course not, but she does, and I hate that manner in a married woman."

"But it's Mr Brown you have to do with, not Mrs Donne, so her manner needn't annoy you. Don't be foolish and



make troubles for yourself, Connie, out of such a trifle as this."

"You wouldn't feel it a trifle if you were pitied, and blamed, and despised, and sympathized with as I shall be about it. Bother their sympathy, I know very well that I shall have awful doses of it from mamma and Boadicea, all because of this abominable folly of his."

"Then you ought to show them that you are not a weather-cock, and that when you form an opinion you can hold to it," Stephanie said, with the calm philosophy of one whom the matter did not immediately concern. Constantia told her in reply that she hoped Mrs Donne would never come in *her* way, that was all! and the expression of that hope lacked the genuine ring of the metal, for Connie Cornwell was in that frame of mind familiarly known as thin-skinned. Stephanie meant well, thoroughly well! But the

well-meaning salve of friendship was as hard to bear almost at the moment as the blister ointment with which Boadicea strove to cure.

This present trouble in the midst of the gay and festive scene was bad enough, but there was worse, very much worse to follow. Constantia knew that if her lover's apparently light regard for her and infatuation for another woman was so manipulated as to sting her now, that in the home circle it would be made to fall with a wringing force to which the sting would be a light thing. Mrs Cornwell was one of those who had always been most severe in her reprobation of Mrs Donne's manners and customs. Now that Mrs Cornwell's unliked future son-in-law had aided in illustrating these manners and customs, Connie felt, and felt truly, that her mamma would not spare her mention of the same.

He was unconscious the while how

deeply he was sinning against decency, order, and Connie Cornwell. He knew but little of the pretty mistress of Donne Place, and he was less severe in his judgment of her than were her gentle fellow-women. She was very pleasant to him, too, on this occasion, manifesting interest in what he had done and in what he might do, in a way that was nice, sympathetic, and intelligent, and that blinded him to the fact of how very little in reality she did know about either. She had the trick of seeming to appreciate and understand that special thing in which they were interested when she was with men. It was a gift, a glorious gift, the grace with which she caught up the idea of whatever might be occupying men's minds and giving them food for speech. They never found her superficial or frivolous, as did even the unprejudiced of her own sex at times, for Dora was, like many another woman of

bright natural abilities, at a great disadvantage with clever women. She lost her fluency and brilliancy when with them alone, and so they often deemed her a flirting, fascinating fool merely, and wondered what men could see in her besides her beauty.

The matter of the chaplaincy had been set at rest that night. Sydney Brown was to have it, and the Bishop had told Mrs Donne that Brown was to have it, and had thus established a sort of confidence between them, for others were ignorant of it yet. "I'm mentally cheering," she said to the young man when she spoke to him about it; "when you're a dean don't forget that I was the first to congratulate you on your clearing yourself from the ruck."

"When I'm a dean I won't, but you mustn't put strange fancies in my head. If I couldn't be happy stopping far short of such an honour as that, I should be an unhappy man all my life."

But though he said this he liked the idea, and was pleased that she should speak of it, as of a thing that might very reasonably be. For he was flushed and triumphant, and his ambition was stirred. This speech of hers was more pleasing to him than was the one with which Connie eventually received the tidings.

“The chaplaincy! oh, I’m so glad. How much a year will it give you, Sydney? and will you have to live in the Palace?”

There was nothing out of the way or offensive, perhaps, in this girl, who was pledged to be his wife, asking what pecuniary advantage he would derive from his promotion. Nothing out of the way or offensive, still any man must feel that it is pleasanter to have an allusion to his probable attainment of still higher honours fall from a woman’s lips when he speaks to her of his present success, than to have a sensible sordid view taken of the matter.

It was natural that Constantia Cornwell should desire to know what amount of vile dross would gild this change in Mr Brown's prospects, but she was unwise to give this desire tongue.

"Come up to-morrow morning and tell me all about it," Constantia said to him when the purgatorial period was over, and they were about to depart for that dreary dreadful drive back to Fleet, the prospect of which had damped even Stephanie's spirits when she thought about it. "I have so much to say to you," she went on, rather reproachfully; and then he looked at her with an honest surprise at the tone of reproach in her face, and said,

"I'll come up directly I get home, but it won't be in the morning, for I stay at the Palace to-night, and I'm not sure yet at what time I shall be able to get away."

Mrs Cornwell heard him say that, and

she did wish most heartily that she had the power to command him home at once. But she lacked this power, therefore she only said stiffly,

“You’ll please to make it as early as you can, Mr Brown; there’s a great deal to do in the parish, and it’s utterly impossible that Mr Cornwell can do everything.” And the blithe tone of voice in which he assured her that he would be forthcoming at an early hour on the ensuing day did not tend to soften Mrs Cornwell’s feelings towards him.

Mrs Cornwell’s frame of mind was lachrymose on their way home. “It’s been a most miserably trying evening to me, but I hope you’ve enjoyed it, my dear?” she said to Stephanie, who assured her that she had very much.

“Miserably trying,” Mrs Cornwell repeated impressively, and then Connie knew that she was going to get it. “I have, I

can conscientiously say, invariably endeavoured to keep my children in their proper puzzition" (when Mrs Cornwell was agitated she was more emphatic than accurate in her pronunciation), "but my efforts have been about as useful as if I had bolted a door with ice in June."

"But, mamma!" Connie pleaded.

"Oh, my dear, I don't blame you *now*, I pity you too much," Mrs Cornwell replied; "Mr Brown, in stabbing the mother, has stabbed the child too."

"It's no use trying to stem the torrent," Stephanie thought, "Aunt Selina's gone off, and Boadicea is well primed, and Connie herself is a jealous goose; but I will soon talk her round when I get her alone. I shall do more good than by speaking now."

So Mrs Cornwell and her eldest daughter treated the subject from every unpleasant point of view the whole way home,



uninterrupted by a word from their two companions. Stephanie remained silent, thinking of the word of promise Denis Donne had given to her when she had last seen him; and Connie diluted the occasion with the tears of mortification and helplessness.

“Don’t let them badger you out of it, it will be all right to-morrow when he comes,” Stephanie said to her youngest cousin that night, or rather that morning. She was too sleepy to say more just now; other people’s love-affairs are not sufficiently exciting to banish sleep from the eyes of the fatigued. Connie answered, “It’s all very well, but it’s too bad that he should have given them the opportunity, when he knows how spiteful they are already.” Then she went and took off her wreath of fern fronds and cyclamen, and wished with all her heart that she had never put it on.

When Lyster Donne was going out of the room with his young wife on his arm that night, Mr Brown met them on his way back from seeing the Cornwells safely to their carriage. "It has been rather a slow affair, hasn't it?" Mr Donne said; "I tell you what, you had better come and have luncheon with us at one to-morrow—we don't leave till three."

"I must be well on my way back to Fleet before one!"

"Nonsense, now, Mr Brown," Dora said, impatiently; "if there's no service to-morrow it will be very unkind of you not to come. I believe that it's only the prospect of having a companion that induced Mr Donne to promise me he would stay. We're going to have dozens of oysters, they are always better here than at home, for some reason or other."

"Oh yes, you'll come. Good-night, Brown," Mr Donne said, walking on, and

Dora nodded and said, "That's right;" and so Sydney Brown found himself mutely pledged to go and eat oysters with Mrs Donne at one o'clock on the following day, and when the hour came he fulfilled that pledge.

After the oysters were eaten Dora had some shopping to do, she said, so they all three went out and loitered away an hour in the streets of St Odulph's, and as the fact of Sydney Brown having the chaplaincy had now cropped out, Mrs Donne had the satisfaction of feeling that the man who was exciting the attention of St Odulph's next in degree to its Bishop was in waiting upon her. She began to fear that she was not destined to hold further communion with the "great man" just yet, but still the bliss was hers of knowing that pale envy was already gnawing the vitals of her detractors.

It was nearly four o'clock before Mr

Brown drove out of St Odulph's, and then he tried to make up for lost time by driving furiously. "He's a nice specimen of the new party, is n't he?" the outgoing chaplain said to his wife. The pair were endeavouring to soothe their aggrieved feelings outside the gates of the town when Sydney Brown's well-hung trap passed them.

"And he behaved most disgracefully with that Mrs Donne last night," the lady replied. "It's not only I that say it, the whole town is ringing with it, ringing; poor Miss Cornwell, I'm sure I feel for her." The worthy pair then went off into generalities about the melancholiness of the thing, and the deplorable occasion it would be for the scoffers to mock.

When Sydney Brown reached Fleet it was too late for him to go up to the rectory before dinner, so he resolved to go up and have tea with them in the evening, and tell them circumstantially of the great good

luck that had befallen him. He was elated at it, naturally enough. The cause for elation was not small; it was the same kind of promotion to him that getting something in addition to "half profits" is to a writer, or the being made private secretary to one of the Lords is to a man in the Admiralty. It was the stepping-stone to something better, when a stand upon it was taken under the auspices of such a man as the new Bishop of St Odulph's. He was elated, and on very good grounds.

He looked forward with pleasurable expectation to telling Connie of it with the fulness of detail to which her position with regard to himself entitled her. She had taken the lowest view of it the night before, but he would not allow himself to dwell on his slight chagrin at her having done so, now. He had no doubt of her in any way as he walked up and rang the rectory door-bell.

Tennyson calls slander "the meanest spawn of hell," and he adds, with how much truth I must leave those who are better versed in such matters than I am myself to decide, that "woman's slander is the worst." However that may be, it is certain that a good deal of this spawn had been deposited at Fleet Rectory in the course of that day on which Mr Brown had been beguiled by Mrs Donne into the error of eating bivalves at St Odulph's, and justice compels me to add that not a male guest had crossed the threshold. Many of the neighbouring families had been to this ball, and members of the various ones dropped in kindly at the Cornwells the day after it to comment on the outrageous conduct of Mr Cornwell's curate with pretty Mrs Donne.

At the same time that they did this, they ignored the report of Constantia's engagement, therefore the spawn was laid

without protest from that miserable young sinner, and Stephanie Fordyce unfortunately remained in her own room all day with a bad head-ache.

“You should have stopped their malicious tongues by telling them the truth outright, Connie,” she said, when Connie went in to speak to her before going down to dinner. “Of course they know very well that you are engaged to him, or they wouldn’t take the trouble to come and air their ill nature before you. But you ought not to let them speak of him in that way ; you ought to speak out for him even if you only liked him and were not engaged to him. As it is, you’re mean-spirited to let such things be said of him by a troop of tame old cats.”

To which Connie made answer that it was all very well for Stephanie to talk, and she trusted Stephanie might never be wrecked upon such a rock as Mrs Donne,

or be blasted by such a fell simoom as Mrs Donne, &c. &c.

To effect a diversion, Stephanie told Constantia that Aunt Ellen intended to give her her *trousseau*, and on hearing this Connie did brighten up, for a while sufficiently to say,

“Allondale has always promised to give me my wedding-dress, you know, Stephanie. I shan’t have satin, I shall have *moire antique*, after all, though we’ve often said that we’d have white satin, but it *is* so unbecoming by daylight, isn’t it? glossier than the skin, you know. Oh, no, I won’t have it.”

This was promising, but when the dinner-bell rang, and Stephanie pleaded to be left alone to get rid of her head-ache before the journey back to town on the following day, Connie relapsed into despondency again. “Aunt Selina and Boadicea are undermining,” Miss Fordyce thought, as



Constantia walked away reluctantly, "but Miss Connie's very soon undermined."

She did not quite realize all Connie had been made to endure that day; the things said had been naturally not so hard for Stephanie to bear as for the plump Miss Cornwell.

The thoughts of the *trousseau* ceased to strengthen Connie's mind before Mr Brown appeared. Terrible things were said to her by her mamma and sister in all affection. Mrs Cornwell gave way to expressions that savoured of orientalism in her anguish. Unless Connie forced a clear explanation of his conduct from Mr Brown, she would in a manner be throwing dirt at the memory of her grand-father, the proud daughter of the house of Allondale averred. By the time Mr Brown appeared, Constantia was not in a state to sympathize with him in his elation. She had been made to smart and suffer through him, and she

could only upbraid and lament and accuse, in a low voice and a sketchy manner.

"My dear girl, if you'll tell me what you're annoyed about, and who it is that has upset you in this way, I shall be able to answer you; at present I'm all in the dark," he said as soothingly as he could, though his patience was sorely tried by what he deemed this uncalled-for ebullition. Then Miss Connie tried to be coherent, and said things that he did not like.

"I'm shocked and disappointed," he said warmly; "I did not think you would insult me by entertaining such disgraceful suspicions. Upon my word, your mother has succeeded in training your thoughts in a nice direction."

Connie thought for a minute how much better it would be to cling to this man through good and ill than to give him up and go back to the hopeless existence with

her mamma and sister, who were always either feebly amiable, or wearily ill-tempered. Just for a minute she thought so, and then foolish pique, the curse of her sex, came and routed this saving reminder from the slight hold it had on her mind. She said —But I withhold my hand, for if a novel void of love would be a desirable thing, as the cleverest man it has ever been my fortune to meet affirms, how desirable must it be that there should be a paucity of lovers' quarrels introduced. Reflecting thus, I will only say that Mr Brown and Connie agreed, with how much pain on both sides may not be known, to part as friends, nothing more.

So the brief engagement ended, and Stephanie took back the tidings to her Aunt Ellen that her generosity would not be taxed in that matter of the *trousseau* after all.

It had been mentioned among them

that night when they were all friendly together in the Rectory grounds, that Stephanie would leave by the 2 P. M. up-train for town on the 27th. And evidently Sydney Brown had remembered this, for when Stephanie was taking her ticket two minutes before the hour on that day, he came up to her and said,

“I have come here to say good-bye to you, Miss Fordyce.”

“I am so sorry,” she said, giving him her hand, and never flinching or blushing though he grasped it heartily. “I am so sorry—so sorry.”

“So am I,” he replied, “but that is not what I came here now to say.”

“Connie is so wretched,” Stephanie said, eagerly, “Mr Brown, it might even yet—”

“No, never,” he interrupted, quickly; “she knew before-hand what it would be, and she came into it, and then drifted out

of it at the first lie they thought fit to utter. It mightn't be even yet, Miss Fordyce; I couldn't have any woman tax me with such blackguardism twice. I came here to-day to ask if you believed it, but I know by the way you gave me your hand that you don't."

"No," she said, "I don't; but Connie's different."

"I know she is, to my sorrow, very different." And then he put her into the railway carriage, the whistle sounded, and the handsome high-spirited girl and the Bishop's chaplain, of whom shocking things were said in the diocese, looked their last upon one another till the former had forsworn the world.

This rupture of his first tangible love-dream was a rude thing; but even in the earliest hours of the shock he knew that he could bear it. He loved Constantia Cornwell, and had he been put to the test he

would have made her a loyal loving husband. But he was not put to the test, and pained as he was when all hope of his ever being so was dissolved, he did not tell himself that he could never be a loyal loving husband to another woman.

It was a very awkward time that intervened between the breaking of this troth and his departure for the scene of his new duties. It was difficult to read the prayers in a desk that abutted immediately upon the Rectory pew, where pale, sorrowful-looking Connie sat on Sundays. It was a hard thing to meet her in the village street in the week, hard for him and for her—very, very hard for both, for they loved one another still. Connie wore a thick veil, and artistically lowered her parasol on these occasions, and he raised his hat and strove to bow away all signs of discomposure; but neither the precaution nor the politeness blinded people—

the pain both felt was a palpable thing. They both felt that they would never come together again, for things had been said by the Cornwells that Sydney Brown could not condone, and therefore they both felt a sort of miserable relief when the curate of Fleet glided into the chaplaincy to the Bishop of St Odulph's.

Meanwhile Stephanie had gone back to town, and had of course borne the tidings. But she had accepted the mission of informant aught but rapturously, and she had told the tale of Connie's sorrow with the quiet conciseness she would have employed had it been her own. "The engagement has been broken off; and I think the less said about such things the better *always*," she said, when her Aunt Ellen pressed her on the point. To her mother she told a little more, because her mother was a more sympathetic woman.

“I think they’re both very miserable—and their misery has all been brought about by that horrid habit people have of interfering. Mamma, if I’m ever engaged, I’ll cut the best friend I know who’ll dare to interfere with me. I couldn’t bear it.”

“Oh, people mean well, Stephanie; they hope to do good, or they wouldn’t risk burning their fingers, I’m sure.”

“But they might just as well mean badly, they do such a precious lot of harm, mamma. ‘Mean well!’ what is the good of their meaning well, if they poison your whole life? ‘Mean well!’ that’s the hardest part of it; ‘it is not an open enemy who has done this thing,’ if it were, and *I* were the sufferer, I’d—”

“You’d do what?”

“Well, mamma, I suppose I should be reduced to Cleopatra’s plaint,—‘had I thy



inches thou should'st know there were a heart in Egypt.' Women always want more inches, don't they, mother? the foe always has some advantage in such a case."

"I'm sure I don't know," Mrs Fordyce replied. "More inches! I'm sure you're tall enough, child, at any rate."

At which Stephanie laughed, and said that wasn't quite what she meant, and asked had her mamma seen more of the future Lady Allondale?

"Yes, she's been here to call, but I didn't see her then, I was gone to Aunt Ellen's to luncheon, for, as I was saying, Stephanie, these days you've been away I've found it very dull and hard to keep in to do anything, you know; so I went over to Aunt Ellen's to luncheon, and—a—and—a—oh, yes to be sure. Captain Donne came in and asked for you, and said he was going to call, but that wasn't—oh!

ah!—this was what I was saying, Miss Conway called while I was there, called *here*, that is, you know; and one day, since then, I saw her in the park, walking quite by herself, and a foreign gentleman making such eyes at her, and no wonder! So I stopped the carriage, and said, ‘My dear Miss Conway, I’ll take you home if you’ll allow me.’ And she was quite relieved, quite relieved, and spoke most properly.”

“I wonder when Willie will be married?” Stephanie said.

“That is what I was going to say, he tells me almost directly.”

“Indeed, mamma? when did he tell you?”

“Yesterday only, Stephanie; and I did promise,” Mrs Fordyce continued, blushing freshly, “to ask her here, to be married from here, you know.”

“What a queer arrangement,” Stephanie exclaimed, “what put it in your head, mamma?”

“Now I think of it, Allondale almost asked me,” Mrs Fordyce replied, “and I saw nothing against it, nothing at all.”

## CHAPTER VII.

SOME OF CAPTAIN DONNE'S PROPOSALS AND  
OBJECTIONS.

NOR could Stephanie, when she came to think over it, find anything to say against this arrangement which had been made, as to Miss Conway's coming to stay with them till she became Lady Allondale. It was queer, in that it was unusual, that was all. Stephanie, being in the habit of advocating the doing of unusual things if they chanced to be equally right with the usual, and at the same time more convenient, could find nothing to say against this plan. For there was nothing wrong in it.

But Miss Crespigny saw and said a

great deal against it, when her niece told her of Mrs Fordyce's offer and Miss Conway's acceptance of it. "It's quite out of the way, and most improper," she said; "I wonder at Mary very much, and I shall not go to the wedding." Then Stephanie had defended her mother, and the propriety of the step she had taken, till all Aunt Ellen's objections were routed.

"And as to not coming to the wedding, you don't mean what you say, for of course you wouldn't slight Willie, and that would be very slighting to him. You'll come, then, and be as agreeable as possible, even if you don't come before, and forgive her for that mistake she——let Mr Donne's footman make."

But that wound was too young a thing for Aunt Ellen to feel as if she could be placable with the giver of it, until the said giver was her nephew's wife. "Then I shall feel it my duty to treat her as Lady

Allondale should be treated, and I always do my duty, Stephanie; but not before, not before, my child."

So Stephanie waived the point of her Aunt Ellen recognizing the fact of Miss Conway's existence just at present, and she began to wonder and half to fear, since the marriage must be now, whether the young lady's residence amongst them would create greater enmity still in the family camp. "It will be a difficult part to play, and she will be a clever girl if she plays it to the satisfaction of us all," she candidly confessed, and she tried to make herself promise that she would not be too exacting in what she required of Miss Conway.

The guest, the homeless girl who had accepted these strangers' hospitality in violation of stern etiquette, in order that she might the more gloriously go forth as the wife of the head of their house, came, and in a few days Stephanie Fordyce felt

that her fear was groundless, and the tolerance she had striven to cultivate an unnecessary thing. Fanny Conway came and conquered. Had all else in life failed this clever young lady, she might have given lessons in the art of being a perfect visitor.

Fanny Conway had been unfeignedly glad to escape from Mrs Pridham's for divers reasons. It has been stated that Mr Goubaud commenced conceiving melodramatic sentiments towards Lord Allondale a few days after Miss Conway's return to Fitzhugh Square. These sentiments had threatened to blaze forth on more than one occasion, not in a way that would have been detrimental to Lord Allondale's bodily integrity, but that might have been offensive to him in another way. He conceived himself to be ill-treated by Miss Conway, and at times it was hard to soothe him back to the uncomplaining,

unrewarded state of vassalage in which she desired to keep him. She had kindled a flame, and it would shoot out in the wrong direction sometimes.

Had the man she was bent on marrying not been a Lord with thirty thousand a year, and large houses, and of sufficient importance to have his movements recorded in the papers, she would infinitely have preferred an alliance with the Frenchman. But a title sways a woman strongly; if it is offered to her, she will let anything short of a downright determined passion go by for the sake of securing it. Now her regard for Goubaud was a light liking, not a determined passion. So though she would have looked upon William Crespigny as a sort of insect had he been a city clerk, she resolved to be faithful for ever to him as he was Lord Allondale.

And this being the case, she knew that it would be well for her to get away from



the constant companionship of Mr Goubaud. She had at times, by way of improving the shining hours and keeping her hand in, as I have said, said and looked very kind things towards him. And he kept these things in his memory, and would not suffer her to forget them either. Therefore she was glad to avoid peril, and get away from the house in which he dwelt. She moreover resolved to give him no clue to her whereabouts until she was safely Lord Allondale's wife. Then she would be founded on a rock of course, and she might with safety mark her appreciation of literature, by offering the hospitality of her house to the chronic contributor to the *Revue des deux Mondes*.

It will have been seen that in the long run she was more liable to get a wound than Dora Donne. She had more heart than that estimable lady, and so skilful as she was she ran greater risks of being hurt.

She had suffered in that matter of Denis Donne; and then before she was well over that, she went back to Fitzhugh Square, and the versatile Frenchman made the hours pleasant to her, and caught her fancy in the rebound.

Miss Conway would suffer no hint of her intended departure to be dropped to any of her fellow-sharers of the delights of Mrs Pridham's mansion. "I am going to Kensington to stay with some of Lord Allondale's relations," she said to her hostess one morning after breakfast; "will you tell Anne to bring my boxes down and call a cab? I shall come and see you again before I'm married." But though she said this, she meant it to be a farewell for ever, only she wanted to avoid an emotional leave-taking. "Won't you say good-bye to *any* of them?" Mrs Pridham asked with the tears in her eyes, for in these days of her glory Fanny Conway was very dear

to her, and Miss Conway told her, "No, there was no occasion for it."

So she went away, and when Mr Goubaud came down to dinner, after looking in vain for her all day, he heard that she was gone. On which he rose hurriedly, and told Mrs Pridham that he had received bad news from France, very bad news, and that he would go and regard the moon upon the walls! pardon him, he would go!

"Regard the moon, indeed; he'll go and curse the poor cats upon the tiles, because that Miss Conway's gone away, that's what he'll do," Miss Smith said spitefully. "I for one say, Thank goodness she is gone, for I felt that what many of my friends said was true, and that 'twas hardly respectable to be associated in any way with a young lady who went on as she did."

Then, Miss Smith having led them on to the attack, Miss Conway received

condemnation from every one for the means used by her to render existence amongst them endurable. Miss Conway meanwhile was deporting herself in that admirable manner which has been already commented upon, and the "means" she had used was up in his own room cursing!—the cats alone, we will hope.

Lord Allondale went along the road that led to the hymeneal altar quietly and quickly now. He was rapidly gaining a great affection for his future wife, and this one circumstance perhaps increased her contempt for him largely. For she knew that were he not despicable himself, he would despise her. However, she behaved admirably, kept all her contempt to herself in store for a future time, and he hurried on the preparations for his marriage in the most flattering manner, and exhibited a lover-like devotion that was almost abject.

He never dared to make the most distant allusion to Mrs Donne when he was

alone with Fanny Conway. He really misunderstood her to the degree (it amused her immensely that he should do so) of imagining that she might nourish a latent spark of jealousy against the mistress of Donne Place. He was afraid to mention Mrs Donne, and yet he longed to make Fanny conscious that admiration for any other woman was merged in intense, absorbing admiration for her now.

But she never opened up an opportunity for him, never made the saying of his recantation an easy thing. She was intolerably indifferent about what had been, in fact, and the painful conviction smote him at last that she did not care! Indeed, there was much that might have been altered with effect in their relations, considering they were going to be tied up together for life.

He lacked the courage, poor little fellow! to break through this barrier of silence without encouragement from her.

He felt that if she looked at him with the look of not caring to know how really puerile had been the affair which had been made such a parade about, through Dora's and his own folly, that he would be overwhelmed with shame. So though the Donnes were spoken about often enough before other people, there was a dead silence observed respecting them whenever Lord Allondale chanced to be alone with his betrothed.

He knew that it would be better for him in the long run, though he did not know exactly how, if he could remove every doubt from her mind before he married her. But he dared not; and she knew that he dared not.

While she was staying with the For-dyces, only a few days before the wedding, Captain Donne called upon them. There was no unpleasant *rencontre*; she heard his name announced, and rose and got away through the back drawing-room

before he entered, whispering hastily to Stephanie that she'd rather not see any one now. She knew that not even her perfect tact could make a meeting between herself and this man pleasant.

"I was told that 'the ladies' were at home, and I only see one," he said, shaking hands with Stephanie, and looking round for her mother, who was gone out for a drive.

"Then you were inveigled in under false pretences,—not that exactly; but mamma, I'm sorry to say, isn't at home, and you won't see the other lady, who is—whom do you think?"

"I don't know—and I'm glad that your mamma is not at home;" then instead of sitting down he came a little closer to the table by which she was seated, and Stephanie knew what he had come to say.

But though she had not the smallest desire to put off the hearing of it for an

instant, she made a feint of turning his thoughts into another channel.

“ You have not guessed my small riddle yet, Captain Donne; a lady is staying here, whom you know very well,—who do you think it is ? ”

“ I don't know, or care much either,” he said. “ I said I was glad your mamma was out, for I—” Then he came closer still to the table, and looked at Stephanie to help him, and though Stephanie uttered no word, perhaps he got the help he needed, for then the flood-gates of speech were loosened sufficiently, and he said all he had come to say.

It is hardly worth while to imagine and write down the words that he used. No two men ask a woman to be their wife in the same terms, therefore the novelist is always open to the remark that “ no fellow would have said that.” Very little is said, as far as I can gather from my friends. I have inquired largely on the subject, with



a view to leading the public to suppose that I write with understanding. I have put matrons and bachelors in the witness-box, charging the one to tell me what were the conclusive words used by their present lords and masters when pleading to become such, and the others what they would say if they were making offers. The end, I grieve to say, has not been worthy of the means. The matrons invariably flounder out of it in a way that leads me to suppose they were never asked at all. While the unmarried men broadly hint that such rehearsals are dangerous, and they would rather not risk getting bitten with the taste.

“I offer you the hand of a gentleman,” or “Take this, the hand of an honest man, and make me happy,” are beautiful phrases for I have seen them, and I would venture to use one on this occasion on behalf of Captain Donne, did I not chance to have a great liking for Stephanie. But I think of

her, and reflect that she would be in an awkward position, for what could she do with it? To return it with exalted politeness to the giver would be damping; to place it upon the table with the pincushion and reels of cotton would be the only course left for her to pursue when she had signified her acceptance of the gift. I should not care to describe Stephanie's dilemma about and final disposition of it, in fact.

Whatever words he used to signify his intention, he made that intention clear, and that being the great point, little more need be said about it than this, that he felt before he had concluded that he had not plunged into error. Whatever hopes Stephanie Fordyce had raised, she was ready enough to ratify.

Like a true woman, she entered unconditionally into the engagement, and then began to be prudent and careful.

"It wouldn't be fair to affect to quite

believe you," she said, when he was uttering something to the effect of her image never having been effaced from his heart since those days at Fleet, "for I have heard to the contrary." On this he laughed, but still looked rather foolish, and assured her that the affair to which she referred had been transitory in its nature.

"But it was shocking and unnatural to have suffered it at all?" she said, for she was thinking of Mrs Donne, and he was alluding to Fanny Conway. Here he defended himself, and so gradually they came to an explanation which was so far clear and satisfactory, that Stephanie learned that the tenderness to which he confessed had been for some girl, and that Allondale's assertion about Dora was a malicious libel void of all foundation.

Now that she learnt that her own lover was totally undazzled by the syren of Donne Place, she was more lenient than ever to that demeanour of Dora's which

had caused poor Connie's heart to ache so fearfully. "Of course Mr Brown was indignant at such an accusation being made against him," she said, after an account of, and a light running commentary on, that business of the Bishop and the ball which had ended so badly for Connie Cornwell. To which Captain Donne replied that "Mrs Donne was one of those women of whom it might be well to see as little as possible, although she was his father's wife."

Stephanie forebore all questioning on the point, with what he thought a most touching and beautiful bridling of curiosity, whereas it was in reality an utter lack of the same. Now that he had convinced her—Stephanie was easily convinced by one she loved—that Mrs Donne's flattering wiles had never been detrimental to him in any way, she did not care to hear about her possible foibles and dangerousness. If Denis deemed it well to restrict intercourse between herself and his step-

mother to the narrowest limits, she was perfectly ready and willing to submit to such restriction.

But before he went he gave utterance to another wish, an acquiescence in which involved greater difficulties. He began by asking if Lord Allondale's marriage was definitely settled ? and Stephanie told him yes, it would take place in a few days.

"In the mean time, ay, and even after it too, don't mix yourself up with her, Stephanie, more than is absolutely necessary. I'm not foolish enough to suppose that she would be a bad companion for you, but I couldn't endure to think that a woman whose perfect integrity and purity can be questioned in the slightest should taint you with her presence."

Stephanie coloured brightly as he spoke. She was not a woman's rights girl ; it seemed to her only good and fitting that the man she was intending to marry should interest himself about and order her go-

ings. Only right, only what she would have desired him to do ; and yet now when he discountenanced the idea of intimacy with the future Lady Allondale, she blushed with annoyance.

“ Will you feel it hard to give her up for me ?” he asked, and then she said—

“ Oh no, it’s not that at all.”

“ But you think I ought to assign a reason for such a request ; you think I ought to tell you why I question the perfect integrity and pure-mindedness of this girl whom your cousin is going to marry ? I can’t do it yet, Stephanie.”

“ No, and it’s not that either,” she replied ; “ it is that I feel we have all been very precipitate to please Willie. Mamma asked her to come here and stay. She’s here now ; the wedding is to take place from here.”

“ Here ! in this house ?”

“ Yes,” she nodded.

“ You don’t mean to say so ?” Captain

Donne exclaimed hastily, rising up and commencing an uneasy parade to and fro in the room. "What in the world did you get her here for?"

He had been engaged to Miss Fordyce for the space of one hour and twenty minutes, so naturally he asked this question with much authority and a little temper. He spoke as if it were his unpleasant duty to put down with a strong hand Stephanie's unruly wishes to have incessant intercourse with the future Lady Allondale. Not that Stephanie entertained such wishes for an instant, she was as ready to forego all that he disapproved of as man's heart could desire. But Captain Donne was apt to rush at hasty conclusions, and he had come to this one now, viz., that if he did not display temper and exert authority at once, an alliance, defensive and offensive in the last degree to him, would be formed between Stephanie and the future Lady Allondale.

He thought very badly of the future Lady Allondale now. He entertained heaven only knows how many erroneous suspicions regarding her since she had proclaimed herself capable of benefitting by those deeds of Mrs Donne's, which the latter dared not bring into the light. He thought that there was contamination for the stainless-natured girl whom he now loved, in the society of that one who had seared his heart formerly, and then sold herself—the price, another woman's fair name before the world—to a feebly vicious little man whom she could not love.

So thinking and fearing thus, and not daring to tell his real reasons and their cause to Stephanie yet, made him ungenerous and illogical.

“It's hideous to me that you should be mixed up with her,” he said, “because she's not at all the kind of woman that I shall like to hear your name associated with.”



"I won't be mixed up with her, or—any one else of whom you disapprove when I'm your wife," Stephanie was on the verge of saying; but she stopped short at "or," and he fell into the mistake of imagining that she thought he was asking too much.

"My dear Stephanie, don't think me unreasonable, but how can you avoid being mixed up with her most intimately while she is staying here?"

"It is hopeless trying to mend that," she said decidedly, for she was afraid Captain Donne might request her to give Miss Conway and her boxes notice to quit immediately. "It is hopeless trying to mend that, Denis. Whatever there may be about her that you disapprove of, there can be *nothing* which would entitle us to get rid of her out of the house after having of our own free will invited her into it. It will be very different," she continued frankly, "when I'm your wife; then you shall rule

my list of friends and acquaintances as absolutely as you will; but while I'm only mamma's daughter, I can't make any decided stand against any one whom I have been instrumental in getting both mamma and the rest of the family to recognize and be civil to. I can't, and don't you be annoyed with me, or disagreeable to Willie and his wife if you're obliged to meet them?"

To which Captain Donne replied that he trusted he should not be so obliged, as it would be for divers delicate reasons most unpleasant to him. With which expression of feeling and hope on his part, Stephanie's earliest troubles commenced, for she felt that she would, while she was Miss Fordyce, be sorely put about to prevent meetings between these two antagonistic parties, both of whom would naturally have the freedom of Mrs Fordyce's house. Her sole desire would be to please Denis Donne now, but she perceived that Denis Donne would be uncommonly hard to please in

this matter. Not for the world would she have pronounced him unreasonable even in the secrecy of her own heart, but she did feel that he would be difficult to manage; and yet not that so much as that she herself was stupid for not being able to decide upon a line of action which should be right in his eyes. She was a loving, frank, high-spirited, sensible girl; imperfect and impressionable enough to feel that the law of the man to whom she had given her heart was right and just, and to act as if his judgment was in all respects vastly superior to her own. It may be a faulty temperament this, but more agreeable, I should fancy, in a wife, than that loftily discontented one which urges its possessor to contend for the liberty of the subject, and to battle for the idea of moving in her own orbit. A faulty temperament may be, but one which it gave Denis Donne unbounded gratification to see that Stephanie possessed.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## A TRANSFORMATION.

FANNY CONWAY maintained a most guarded secrecy with respect not alone to her thoughts and feelings, but her immediate intentions and whereabouts, from Mr Goubaud while she was still Miss Conway. She knew well that when in the fulness of time it would be safe, as far as she was herself concerned, for her to whistle him back, that he would come with a bound—for whatever hers was for him, his was no light liking for her. But there would not be safety in thus whistling yet, not, indeed, until she was Lady Allondale.

The days that intervened between Captain Donne's proposal and Lord Allon-

dale's marriage were not such pleasant days to Stephanie as one is bound to believe the earlier days of an engagement ought to be. Stephanie had for one hour hoped to evade her difficulties, by sparing all mention of the change in her own prospects till Willie had borne his bride away. But Mrs Fordyce spoilt that scheme by going at once, with beat of mental drum and wave of mental flag, to Miss Conway with the tidings. When once it had been told to Miss Conway, Stephanie gave up the battle for reserve, and turned resolutely away from the contemplation of how much pleasanter it would have been if her mamma had only been good enough to keep silence.

But that it would have been very much pleasanter in many respects had such silence been kept, there can be no manner of doubt. Fanny Conway came down, and with promptitude, and without fussiness, said all that it was well bred and proper

to say on the occasion. She had had a sharp tussle with herself up in her own room after Mrs Fordyce had delivered herself of the tidings and retired to congratulate and question Stephanie afresh; but of that tussle no one knew anything, and when she came down she was as affably well-disposed towards Captain Donne as it was well Lord Allondale's wife should be to Lord Allondale's pet cousin's husband.

"I like Captain Donne so much. I think so well of him in every way, that I quite look forward to seeing and congratulating him," she said to Stephanie later in the evening, when emotions of various kinds had overpowered Mrs Fordyce, to the extent of making her what she called "dozy;" and the two girls had removed themselves from her vicinity in order not to disturb her. They were standing by the window when Miss Conway spoke, and their backs were turned towards the lamps. But for all this disposition of the light,

Fanny could see that Captain Donne's betrothed received this commendation of him with a blush that was not one of unqualified pleasure. Had she possessed a knowledge of the difficulty Fanny experienced in giving vent to it at all, the blush of annoyance might have been still more vivid.

"When shall I see him? I quite look forward to doing so," Miss Conway continued. She began to fear that Captain Donne, in a weak moment, might have confessed to this, his "new" love, some passages of by-gone experiences gained from herself, the "old." Fanny was not in love with Captain Donne any longer; she desired to bury the memory of the days when she had been in love with him. She had an ardent desire for her future path being adorned with the respect of her husband's family—their mere liking and admiration she had won already. But she wanted their respect too; and it might

weaken this feeling in Stephanie's mind to learn that she had been, when Miss Conway, in the habit of making what were uncommonly like assignations with handsome men, of whose real names she was ignorant. So now, when Stephanie received her advances with evident discomposure, she began to fear that a good deal might have leaked from Captain Donne conversationally, that it would have been well for her to know was hermetically sealed up.

"You are very kind," Stephanie said. "I have no doubt you will see Captain Donne soon—that is, sometime."

"Probably I shall, for I can't imagine that you are designing to keep us apart; and in the nature of things, Stephanie, who should I see much more of than of you and your husband?"

"He's not my husband yet, and even if he were, I couldn't answer for when he'd appear and when he wouldn't." Stephanie tried to say it with a good-tempered as-



sumption of carelessness, and she failed in saying it thus. She felt quite sorry that when the lady was well disposed towards him, Denis should be antagonistic. It did not seem polite, and though "doubtless Denis had good reasons for everything he did," she thought, still she could not bear that he should "seem" anything that was not perfectly agreeable.

"Of course I shall see him on Thursday" (Thursday was to be the wedding-day), Miss Conway went on pertinaciously; "but then I shall have no time and no inclination, very likely, to speak to him."

"Nothing has been said to him about Thursday yet. You see, till this afternoon it was nothing to him whether Willie was married or not."

"But now it is something to him, inasmuch as it concerns your cousin, Stephanie. Well, I hope to see him, that's all I know, not only on Thursday, but at Fleetwold

with you very often. Oh dear! I wish you lived in the parish instead of the Cornwells. I have no doubt they are very nice, the girls, but I distrust Aunt Selina."

Stephanie was very glad to change the subject from Denis Donne and his possible friendship or enmity with the Allondales. She began to talk about Mr Brown, and what a goose her Aunt Selina had been in causing disunion between Connie and him willingly.

"To tell the truth," she said, "Aunt Selina knows no medium manner. If she doesn't want people to carry her goloshes she wants to carry theirs, as it were."

"I wonder if she'll want me to carry her goloshes?"

"No, not in any way. You will find Aunt Selina very pleasant, I am sure. She's the reverse of disagreeable to any one in the family over whom she can't rule. It's the sense of power that spoils her."

"Is she pleasant after the same pattern

as your Aunt Ellen?" Fanny asked, demurely; she had not forgotten or forgiven that estimable lady's attack on her prospects.

"Never, to me," Stephanie replied, quietly, "for this reason, that I am very fond of Aunt Ellen: so fond of her that I never permit a doubt to be thrown upon her powers of being pleasant before me." Stephanie said this in a tone that induced Miss Conway to propose that they "should have a little music."

Great news, whether it was bad or good, always produced one and the same effect upon Miss Crespigny. When she was startled and surprised she never waited to think whether she might perchance be pleasurably so; she took it for granted that she was *not*, and that it behoved her to be ill-tempered, and to order water-gruel and look out long prayers at once.

"I'm only an old woman, and I know that it doesn't become me to expect any-

thing else, but it's hard, very hard, after having known you from a baby, Stephanie," she said, when her niece had at length made her understand the truth about Denis Donne.

"Now, Aunt Ellen! 'hard,' when it was only the other night you were lamenting over my forlorn old maidenhood."

"I know it doesn't become me to repine, I *said* so, Stephanie; of course it's well that we should be bruised and chastened, not that I ever anticipated taunts from you about being an old maid, when there were jackanapes enough wanting to marry me *not* so many years ago," she wound up in a gush of returning lively rage that was refreshing after the repining resignation.

"I shall not tell you that I didn't mean a 'taunt,' Aunt Ellen, because you know very well that I didn't," Stephanie said, half-laughing. "You'll see that it's all natural and right and proper in a day or

two ; you know you like Denis, you know you were delighted with him that day he came up with you from Donne Place ; but we won't dwell on my delinquencies. I want to speak about Thursday."

"I shan't come on Thursday," Miss Crespigny said sharply ; and then she put her handkerchief up to her eyes and said, "There was a time for laughing and a time for weeping, she knew ; none better."

"I know no one knows it better than you do," Stephanie said cheerfully, "so you'll know that Thursday's a day to laugh, and you'll come and see Willie made happy." Miss Fordyce felt that there would be quite enough to do in answering inquiries as to the non-appearance of the other mal-content, Denis Donne.

"Oh ! I'm only an old woman," Miss Crespigny replied irrelevantly, and then she stole a look at Stephanie and relented.

"My dear child," she cried warmly, "there, there ! leave me alone now, and

come again to-morrow, I shall be better then."

Stephanie, feeling that there was much wisdom in this course, left her aunt free to work off the effects of the shock in her own way, and Miss Crespigny's own way was a mighty unpleasant one for the rest of that day to her servants.

Charles Fordyce came up to attend the wedding of the head of his house, and naturally enough gave in his adhesion to the beautiful bride-elect at once. "I suppose Donne's taken for granted, Stephanie, for I don't see his name here," he said to his sister, when he was looking over the list of the invited on the night of his arrival.

"No, he's not exactly taken for granted," she replied, getting up and leaning over her brother's shoulder, and trying to caress him into forgetfulness of Donne till Miss Conway should have retired. "What pretty new 'charms' you have, Charlie; oh, you dandie."

"So have you a good many new ones," he replied, kissing her, "or else it is that you're fresh to me; I'll go over and call on Donne to-morrow, Steph. I suppose he's going to be Allondale's best man, as I have not been asked?"

"No, he isn't. I don't know that he's coming. I don't think that he will be able to come, he's very busy."

"Busy! you little goose, Denis Donne never did any business in his life except make love to pretty girls, and I suppose he has given that up now."

The following day, when Captain Denis Donne braved the disagreeables of a possible meeting with either Miss Conway or Lord Allondale, for the sake of seeing Stephanie, she put it to him very earnestly whether it would not be better for him to grace the ceremony of Thursday with his presence, rather than that she should submit to further cross-questionings on the subject.

"I have vowed that you're busy, but they don't seem to believe in the busyness," she said in a semi-despairing tone. "Mamma observes fifty times a day that it's most extraordinary you should not wish to come," and Charlie says it's queer, and Willie says it's odd, and, in fact, every one says something, and it bothers me dreadfully, Denis."

"My darling! I wouldn't have you bothered on my account for the world."

"Then come."

"And choke myself with wishing health and happiness to a brace of people I dislike beyond everything? Well! I'll come if you make a point of it, but I had much rather you did not make a point of it."

"Then, Denis, there is to be an eternal awkwardness between you and them?" she said seriously. "Don't think," she continued honestly, "that I would weigh it for one instant against the happiness of



having your love, but I shall feel it as an awkwardness nevertheless."

"By-and-by we shall not be thrown together, and if we are unavoidably, I won't make you feel awkward, dear; but, by heaven, I had rather that you felt so than see an intimacy grow up between my wife and that woman. I don't think well of her, Stephanie, and I don't want to see you very fond of her, as any one is sure to be who is much subjected to the influence of her fascination."

"Were *you* ever under the influence of her fascination?" she asked quickly.

"Yes," he said, taking both her hands in his, and looking down into her face. "But it's no fear of that fascination being exercised over me again that makes me wish to keep aloof from her." Then to do away with any possible distrust she might conceive, Denis told her the story of how Lord Allondale's engagement had

come about, as Fanny had told it to him that night in the garden at Donne Place.

Reflecting that one was Denis' step-mother and the other her own cousin, Stephanie could only say that she was "sorry—very sorry for Willie's weakness, and that there were such women."

"But you can't wonder at my wanting to keep you apart from them?" he said.

"Oh no, not at all; and am I to be kept from Mrs Donne too?"

"Stephanie, I shall be no gaoler, but I can't think that you'll sigh for their companionship."

"I know it's quite natural and right and proper on your part, Denis, and for myself I shouldn't care if I never saw one of them (except Willie) again; but it seems to me now that my whole life will be taken up in evading some one or other: it won't be so, I know, but it looks so now. I shall be

heartily glad when they're married, and you and I can breathe freely again."

Outwardly it was a most auspicious wedding that took place on the Thursday following this conversation. Lord Allondale was delighted with his bride's appearance, and he had good grounds for being so, for Miss Conway was faultlessly dressed, and did not mar the effect by emotion. He was also delighted with his own appearance, which showed a contented mind, for it was not too prepossessing in Lady Allondale's eyes.

Stephanie Fordyce, the Cornwells, and an unimportant young lady, who was always ready and willing to do this kind of thing for any one who asked her, were the bridesmaids. Mrs Fordyce and Connie Cornwell cried through the whole of the service, the former because she always had cried at weddings, and meant to do so all through the chapter, and the latter "because it reminded her so of Sydney

Brown," she said,—though how a large group of women in low dresses posed before the altar rails of old Kensington church could remind her of that gentleman is not quite intelligible.

Miss Crespigny had justified Stephanie's expectations, and had come, in the grandest of silver grey moires and white lace shawls and bonnets. She only saw the bride for a moment before they left for the church. Speech was not called for then, so the vow Miss Crespigny had made not to greet the offender till she was Lady Allondale, was kept. But during that moment Fanny had time to execute a salam to the lady whom she had caused to be confined as a lunatic, that was edifying in the depth of its gracious humility.

Mrs Fordyce never deviated in the slightest degree from the programme she had taught herself that it was well to observe on these matrimonial occasions. She cried during the whole of the service, as

heartily and plenteously as if she had been witnessing the burial of her best-loved ones. She dried up when they were signing their names in the registry. She was always blithe as a bird during the drive home from the sacred edifice, and this blitheness continued to reign without intermission until steps were being taken towards cutting the cake, when she lapsed into the lachrymose again with profusion and vigour. She said that she wept because it was "so very touching," and though I have never been able to produce a single tear myself at either of the ceremonies—namely, the marriage or the cutting of the cake—still not a word can be urged against that perfect propriety of feeling which induced copious weepings on Mrs Fordyce's part.

There was not the shadow of a doubt about Lord Allondale's perfect satisfaction in this termination of an affair that had been repugnant to him at first. He was

intoxicated with his bride's beauty and elegance, and as he fondly hoped that all were ignorant of the very dubious steps she had taken to achieve her destiny, he suffered this intoxication to appear. "She's marvellously pretty, there's no doubt about that," Charles Fordyce said to his cousin Connie, "but if Allondale had just won a Derby he couldn't look more elated, and that's absurd, you know." Then he assisted Miss Connie into the carriage, and wondered whether she expected him to condole with her on the subject of her recent bereavement. "It hasn't pulled her down," he said to himself critically, nor had it, in truth, Connie being one of those who fatten as kindly on sorrow as on anything else.

The average wedding breakfast is not quite as odious in the pages of a novel as in real life, but there is very little amusement to be extracted from it in either case. This one that Mrs Fordyce gave at her old

house, in the old Kensington quarter, was uncommonly like the majority of those which are celebrated annually at the close of the season, when the paucity of other amusements gives time for such minor matters as marriages to come off. The bride made herself universally agreeable, and accorded a special invitation to Miss Crespigny to "come and stay at Fleetwold with me when we come back," which special favour caused Miss Crespigny's face to assume the appearance of one who was compelled to eat that of which the taste was unpleasant to her. After that Lady Allondale uttered a very frank and affectionate farewell to Stephanie, so frank and affectionate that Stephanie felt sorry that she could not honestly respond to it any more. Then there was the usual slight emotional confusion, and Lord and Lady Allondale were away on the first stage of their wedding-tour.

Later in the day, partly because the

wine was in his head, and partly because it was not in Charles Fordyce's nature to see any one unhappy without trying to comfort that one, he did venture upon the delicate ground of her late disappointment to Connie.

"I was very sorry to hear your mother had induced you to throw Brown over, Connie," he said. "He is such a capital fellow that you're not the girl I take you for if you let Aunt Selina's humbug stand in the way for long."

Hereupon Connie related her woes, and gave Charlie to understand that it no longer rested with her, and that the throwing over had been mutual, and that she was very wretched, and delighted to talk about it. "I could have put up with his paying that Mrs Donne attention myself, but I couldn't put up with hearing it talked about as Boadicea and mamma would talk about it, you know, Charlie," she said, after relating the events of the



ball at St Odulph's. And Charlie replied, "No, perhaps not, but it's the very devil for a fellow to have the girl jealous at every start," which made Connie think that her cousin Charles Fordyce regarded the jealousy as a greater offence than the cause.

"It's so dull at Fleet now," Connie went on after a little more desultory conversation, "so awfully dull, for ma's as cross as two sticks, although she has had her own way in the matter and got it broken off."

"Ah! daresay it is. You'll find yourself all right again when Willie and his wife are at the park. She'll keep the place alive, if I'm not mistaken. I shall be staying there often, for I always liked Willie, though he's a beastly bore when taken alone. I shall go down in November, Connie, and have a week's hunting."

So he cheered Connie with thoughts of future festivities at Fleetwold, and with hopes of a presence that he knew was very

generally pleasant and welcome to young women, and Connie responded gratefully to being so cheered and consoled for the loss of the man at whom even her father had marvelled for ever stooping to win her. On the whole, Mr Brown was very right indeed to remember, even in the earliest hours of the dissolution of that engagement, that the world held something very substantially good for him still.

It was the last week in October when these events occurred, and it came to be agreed upon while the family were still together that Stephanie and Captain Donne should be married in the July of the next year, when Stephanie would have attained her majority and come into possession of the fortune settled upon her by her father. "And she'll have a trifle more when I die; it won't be much, how should it with my very limited income? but what I can save she will have," Aunt Ellen, who had come

round to the popular view of the case, said to Mr Donne when he came up with his wife to welcome Stephanie's meditated advent into the family.

Denis Donne had said to Stephanie when he found that his father and step-mother were coming up, "Don't be carried away to the point of confiding in Mrs Donne, Steph; Dora's a charming woman, and as deceitful as the devil, and if you forget that last fact for an instant, she'll make you remember your lapse of memory at some future day. I warn you, you'll be delighted with her when she comes, and think I am wrong."

"That I never shall, Denis; I may think her delightful, very likely, for I own I thought she was that at the ball, though she was wringing poor Connie's heart. She was absolutely alive with beauty and intelligence as she stood talking to Mr Brown, and I couldn't help feeling that Connie's glum face would come like a damper upon

him when he turned to it. She must be a very clever woman ? ”

Now the phase of Dora's cleverness with which Captain Donne was best acquainted was her cunning, and it had not impressed him very favourably. He was not one for whose subjugation Dora had deemed it necessary to play off her small tricks of superior intelligence, she reserved such things for such men as the Bishop and Mr Brown.

“ Yes, I suppose she is clever—sharp, you know, but so intolerably vain. Even my father has found out her vanity ; that's where that other one, Lady Allondale, has the pull upon her. She may have as much, but she keeps her vanity under, Dora airs hers. There's one thing though that Mrs Donne has the pull of her in, otherwise they are as preciously well-matched a pair as I have ever seen.”

“ And what is that thing, Denis ? ”

“ Dora has not an atom of feeling for

any one in the world but herself, she never has had and never will have, and that gives her an advantage over Lady Allondale. *She* has a heart, and her husband hasn't touched it."

"Poor Willie," Stephanie said gravely ; "badly as he has behaved about Mrs Donne, and silly as he has been about his wife, I hope no one else will ever touch her heart, Denis."

"I hope not, but Allondale can't expect her to revere him very much," Denis said, "so it will only be regard for herself that keeps her straight if she does keep so." Then Denis ceased from his pleasant prognostications regarding the bride, and returned to the charge against his step-mother.

But for all Denis had said, Stephanie was fain to confess when Mrs Donne came that she was very charming and very nice. Dora was evidently troubled with no un-

pleasant retrospections, she told Stephanie that she should love Denis more than ever now he had given her such a delightful daughter. "I am not that yet," Stephanie said, but she liked Mrs Donne's frankly-expressed pleasure, and was pleased with her for having taken the trouble to bring Ethel to town for the sake of introducing her to her brother's bride-elect.

"I knew you'd like to see her, for of course she's much nearer and dearer to Denis than I am," she said to Stephanie. "I don't think Ethel has imbibed the popular notion that I'm detestable because I'm her step-mother; still, poor little thing, I saw that she felt when she heard about Denis and you that it concerned her more nearly than it did me; therefore I brought her. She won't bore you?"

"No, no, I should like to have her stay with me," Stephanie said rashly, forgetting at the time what a nuisance "an angel in

the house" is if it does not belong to you and you are still responsible for its well-being and good conduct.

"I should like to have Ethel to stay with me very much, if you thought she wouldn't be dull," she repeated. Mrs Donne, who did very often find the sweet child of her loved lord's first wife a bore of magnitude, replied,

"She's dull enough at Donne Place, poor little dear; it's very kind of you to ask her, and I am sure Lyster will be delighted. But it rather interferes with my plans, for I wanted you to come down and stay at Donne Place with me for a long time."

"I never do stay away for a long time from home, and for the next few months I shall be obliged to go about amongst my relations a great deal. It's very kind of you, but, I really—"

"Oh, you must come," Mrs Donne said earnestly. "When you've satisfied the

Cornwells' claims and Lady Allondale's (isn't she a charming creature? I'm so fond of her!) you must come to us, for we shall be relations."

For this Stephanie thanked her and said they would see about it, and felt that she had not by any means got out of her difficulty. "These perpetual invitations to places where Denis won't like me to go will wear me to my grave," she said laughingly to herself when Mrs Donne had departed, leaving Miss Ethel behind her. "How prettily she said Lady Allondale was 'charming' and that she was very fond of her; I forgot at the time they detested each other."

Mrs Donne had departed, leaving Miss Ethel behind to cultivate and be cultivated by her future sister-in-law, and Miss Ethel's boxes were to be sent up from Donne Place without delay. "Don't keep her a minute longer than you like," Dora had said, and Stephanie had replied, "Perhaps it would



be better to ask her for a definite time, and then when she leaves you won't think I'm tired of her. Let her stay with me a month?" and Dora acquiesced right willingly in this, and for the first day of her sojourn with the Fordyces the little Ethel was supremely happy.

But the following morning the little Ethel commenced heaving portentous sighs, and Stephanie trembled at what she had done. The old house had not known the patter of the feet of childhood for many years; there was no place in which the small guest could play at pulling all the furniture out of order without bringing upon herself glances of reproach that she could ill brook from the domestics who had to put it in order again. Ethel had the freedom not alone of the house and grounds, but of the stables and kennels at home. Here she was restricted to what seemed a very small garden to her. The sister of the man she loved was a mighty in-

cubus to Miss Fordyce ere the second day of her visit was over. She disturbed Mrs Fordyce's afternoon's nap. She interrupted Stephanie five times in the perusal of a passage in 'Romola,' on a clear comprehension of which Stephanie intuitively felt that a considerable portion of the interest of that grand novel hinged. The little Ethel had large blue eyes and luxuriant golden locks, and a face that strikingly resembled her adored brother's; but she was unendurable when in rapid succession she pleaded "for pencil and paper to draw, for a book to look at the pictures, for something pretty off the mantel-piece to play with, that she wouldn't break, only dress it up in the anti-macassar" (said 'something' being an alabaster statuette of fragile proportions), "for pretty little paints like mamma gave her, and then some pictures to colour, plates with ladies and children in them; for something else to do because she was tired.

of that, and might she go up-stairs to Miles, and look at the things on Stephanie's table? and oh, no, she wouldn't touch them." So Stephanie gave her the pleaded-for permission to go up to her maid; and Miss Ethel forthwith confided to that functionary many state secrets relating to Mrs Donne's toilette, which that unguarded lady was in the habit of making before the innocent child. "Mamma keeps her red lips in a little thing like a leaf. Where does Miss Fordyce keep hers?" Ethel asked of Miles, whom she found sitting in her young mistress's dressing-room; and then the "pretty lamb," as Miles called her, made a raid upon the toilet-table, and mentioned so many things in which it was less well furnished than her mamma's, that Miles spent a most pleasant and improving afternoon.

The dear child was doubly agreeable whenever Denis came. She had prayed to sleep with her door open because she was

frightened, and her prayer had been granted. The first benefit she derived from the open door was to creep down in her nightgown and career wildly into their midst the moment she heard her brother's voice, which sound fell upon her ear when she had been in bed an hour. She looked very pretty flying into the room with her streaming golden hair flowing away like a glory, her fresh bright face flushed with excitement and first sleep, and her white beautifully-moulded little feet and legs. She looked very pretty, and Denis caught her up and kissed her and called her a "little beauty," and, together with Stephanie, petted her for two minutes, and then suggested that she should go back to bed. Which suggestion being immediately carried out by Miles, who had swooped down after her, the little beauty was carried away, indulging in a prolonged roar, and pinching Miles' arms.

"She's a dear little thing," Stephanie

said when they were able to hear themselves speak. Mrs Fordyce was still roseate-hued; the apparition of Ethel's bare ankles had been painful to her.

"Oh, very," Denis replied, "uncommonly nice child, but, Stephanie, you don't mean always to have her with you, do you? Mrs Donne always banishes her when she bores."

"Now, Denis, would it be fair to your small sister to ask her to stay with me and then treat her as a bore?"

"Well, just as you like, Stephanie, when I'm not here, but I ain't used to children, and you wouldn't like to set me against my sister, would you? It would be a terrible thing, and if you'd avoid it you had better implant a wholesome horror of me in Miss Ethel's mind. I like the 'age of innocence,' but I don't care to have it walk out of its frame and expect me to nurse it when I have something better to do."

"Oh dear, mamma," Stephanie said, a few days after this, "I find it is a mistake to ask a child to stay with you unless you have a legitimate safety-valve for its animal spirits in the house. Here now Denis says that Ethel is so tedious to him that he shall not come very often till she is gone. I'm *always* being let into things that keep Denis away." Miss Fordyce was seriously put out. Captain Donne from an adoring lover was rapidly transforming himself into a gentleman who could not brook with amiability the smallest crumple in his rose-leaf. "Surely if he loved me so very much such trifles wouldn't keep him from me," poor Stephanie would think sometimes when Denis would be mentioning some one of the many things that "would prevent his seeing much of her."

By-and-by Lord and Lady Allondale winged their flight back from the Continent, and spent a December week in town before they went on to Fleetwold,

and then Stephanie witnessed another's transformation..

She had been out driving one day with Lady Allondale, and had gone with her to a shop in Regent Street. When they came out again, and before they could get into their carriage, the young Frenchman whom she remembered to have seen the day Allondale met with his accident, and *once since*, brushed past them, and on his face there lived now no lightly laughing, happily conceited smile. Stephanie half bowed to him involuntarily as he drew back at sight of the two ladies, and as he lifted his hat in a way that is most unusual in a naturally chivalrous Frenchman, as if the recognition were forced from him in fact. Miss Fordyce glanced hastily at Lady Allondale, and was struck afresh suddenly with her golden hair and brunette face. "Haven't I seen him with you?" she asked suddenly. And Lady Allondale replied, "Yes—(home)—he's an old friend of mine. I'm sure you'll like

him, Stephanie; he's one of the cleverest men I know."

Most men would have thought better of a woman who had made the moves of a game of love as Miss Conway had, if she had been straightforward enough to bid them adieu honestly, and tell them that she was soon going to be married. But Mr Goubaud was not cast in such a mould. He had been what a young Englishman would have termed "preciously cut" when he heard that she was gone away; he himself called it being "anguished," and elected to regard the moon from his back-bedroom window for three nights. But he was more flattered, and he liked her better, and lashed up his love for her to higher heat than he could have done had she not thus betrayed that she dreaded his influence over her. He could not flatter himself that her marriage had been forced upon her by ambitious friends and grasping parents; it had been the work



of her free will. But for all that he felt that if she did not love him, she had been uncommonly afraid of getting to do so, and there was satisfaction to him in this thought. He was a clever young fellow, and he judged truly that the old laughing gallantry would be less likely to touch her now than an exhibition of half-passionate devotion, half-melancholy reproach. And as he felt these things towards her it was easy enough to exhibit them when he met her in Regent Street.

## CHAPTER IX.

## AUNT SELINA WELCOMES THE BRIDE.

LORD and Lady Allondale came down to their place, Fleetwold, in December, and directly Lady Allondale entered the house she declared to herself that she would always do her duty in a faultless way in this uncommonly pleasant state of life to which fate had been pleased to call her. There was immense satisfaction, too, in thinking that this very tangible good thing had been won for her entirely by the clearness of her own head! It may be very gratifying to come by inheritance to a great good, but there is much more satisfaction in winning that same for one's self.

Mrs Cornwell had come up from the

Rectory to meet, and be introduced to, and welcome her chief nephew's bride. Her daughters had implored her not to do so. "Pray don't go up to-night, mamma, she *will* think it so fussy," Boadicea had urged. "And she's not at all one to like one the better for making a fuss, however kindly, about her." Thereat Mrs Cornwell had arrested the stream of Boadicea's eloquence by telling her that "as the daughter of the late Lord Allondale, she, thank goodness, required to be given no instruction as to her behaviour to the wife of the present Lord Allondale." So she had gone up and spent three hours alone in the big drawing-room, they being three hours later than had been anticipated.

But she had not been dull; not at all dull, though dulness was far from incompatible with the Fleetwold drawing-room. She had summoned the housekeeper, and the butler, and the head gardener, into her presence at different times, and had ques-

tioned them all sharply as to what they had been doing "by order," and what they were going to do "by order," with a view not alone of impressing upon them her own thorough information upon all points, but also with the design of finding out what sort of house was to be kept, and, in fact, what sort of a life altogether was to be led.

They had no kindly feelings towards Mrs Cornwell at Fleetwold. The servants one and all declared her to be "that odious in respect of her prying and peddling about, that they hoped the last of orders as *they* was to have through her had been given." From her being thus odious in their eyes, the information the three servitors whom she elected to honour with interviews this day doled out to her was of the scantiest.

"Captain Fordyce is coming next week, Flint," Mrs Cornwell said to the house-keeper. "And Mr Frank, my eldest son, tells me Lord Allondale is very urgent upon him to come too, but if you'll have

any difficulty about rooms, I can sleep them at our place."

"Thanking you kindly, ma'am," Mrs Flint answered, "but we shall have no difficulty as regards rooms, Mrs Cornwell, for Captain Fordyce and Mr Francis."

"Then you are not expecting many so early as next week?"

"Not more than we can hold, ma'am; my Lady has been good enough to send me a list, and Fleetwold can contain them all, ma'am," Mrs Flint, who was of the imposing order of female in black silk and mits, replied.

"Oh! indeed; well, let's see, I forget the names myself; let's see, *who* is coming first, Mrs Flint?"

"The names has escaped me, ma'am, and being some of them foreign I will not venture to repeat them; but if you *want to know who's coming*, I make no doubt that my Lady will excuse me for showing you the list."

At which Mrs Cornwell, who did not desire that her attempts to penetrate the future should be made known to Lady Allondale, tapped her foot rather fiercely on the floor, and said, "Oh no, it was not worth while," and suffered Mrs Flint to feel that the interview might be brought to an end as soon as she pleased.

Mrs Flint had made another suggestion besides that one of showing her the list, which was unpleasant in its nature to Mrs Cornwell. "It can't be pleasant for you to wait here alone for them, and they so long after their time, through not expecting to see you, very likely, ma'am," the considerate housekeeper had observed. Mrs Cornwell had coloured up, and replied, "that she didn't mind it at all, any more than if he was her own son for whom she was waiting, and that she shouldn't think of going away till they came, for they would be sure to expect to see her." But for all that she said she

liked it, she grew both hungry and cross as the hours went by and she still waited in the big drawing-room alone.

In truth, there was not much to compensate her for the loss of her dinner and other home comforts in the present aspect of affairs at Fleetwold, and though it is always a hard matter to say what will give pleasure to another person, I do venture to utter a doubt as to the truth of that statement of hers relative to her not disliking having to wait so long for those for whom she looked. To be sure, tastes vary considerably. I, for instance, together with many thousands of my fellow-creatures, cordially admire Mr Lawrence's bright, rapid, vigorous style ; whereas many whom I know give in their adhesion to a much meeker maker of mysteries, and prefer a strong flavour of Temperance tract, with the expanded police-report which they swallow in three-volume form. To some it is given to appreciate the rare skill by

which the men and women in 'Orley Farm' and 'The Small House at Allington' are made to stand before us, living, breathing, moving *possibilities*. While others delight not in them (these are, I confidently hope for the credit of my generation, in a minority), and revel in the society of regenerated bankers, and awakened swindling clerks who combine strong religious principles with a desire to pick and steal, and great force of character, according to the writer's broad statement, with what looks to the reader like unqualified infirmity of purpose. We are all right of course, we who love strength and we who love well-meaning weakness; sparkling wine and the most plentifully diluted of milk,—each has its merits, or, at any rate, answers the purpose of its vendor, and what more is needed? Yes, we are all right, we who like mere men in books, and we who bend the knee before the mighty power which can portray successfully



enough to ensure many editions the regenerated young man who went to the bad in the first, and mustn't, in the nature of things, come back from it till rather late in the third volume. We are all right, for taste is relative, and there is immense beauty, doubtless, in that brightly-coloured illustration of his Majesty the present King of the Belgians, and her Royal Highness the Princess Charlotte, with which all visitors to country cottages are acquainted; and in the novel where the characters are toned down so delicately that you cannot clearly distinguish one from the other, which lack of individuality takes the sting out of their demise, and spares the reader the pang that would otherwise be his when he learns that all must die.

But however much she might have liked sitting alone in the room, feeling hungry and with nothing to do, Mrs Cornwell was undoubtedly not sorry when they arrived. Lady Allondale came in, as has

been said, fraught with a resolution to do always that which was right and proper in a position that she correctly assumed might be a delightful one. But it was too much, she felt, to be compelled to be amiable in her present tired state, to a voluble woman with a red nose, simply because that woman was her husband's aunt.

"Aunt Selina lives a great deal too near Fleetwold to be pleasant, I can see that," Fanny thought as she sat quietly at the very late dinner looking at and listening to her husband and Mrs Cornwell. Lord Allondale was most affable to his aunt, for he was so proud of his wife that he was glad to exhibit her even to Mrs Cornwell. He was in an exuberant state of satisfaction, and asked that the girls should be requested to come up early on the following morning. "Hadn't they better come up to luncheon, Fanny?" he asked, and she coolly replied that she really couldn't say—it must depend upon

whether the Miss Cornwells thought it "better" that they should do so.

"Oh, yes, tell them to come, with my love, Aunt Selina. Some fellows are coming to-morrow evening from town, they'll be here by dinner-time, so Boadicea and Connie must stay of course. By-the-by, we must find some one to put Brown out of Connie's head, or has she got over it already?"

At this Mrs Cornwell poured forth the story of her woes respecting Mr Brown, and bewailed Connie, and delivered a light fire of censure on Mrs Donne, and even, discreet clerical dame that she was, said things that were not reverential about the Bishop. When she spoke about him, Lady Allondale forgot her fatigue, and questioned Mrs Cornwell pretty closely as to Mrs Donne's latest triumph and its effect.

"But people can't think that he flirts with her, whatever she might do with him,

can they?" Lady Allondale asked; and Mrs Cornwell replied,

"Oh! my dear, no, not that, but his being friendly with the Donnes obliges many people to invite her who wouldn't have done so had the Bishop held himself properly aloof from her. To go to a ball, you know, *he* a Bishop! just, as it seemed, for the sake of giving Mrs Donne an opportunity of showing off her airs and graces! it was an error of judgment on the Bishop's part, most decidedly."

"Oh! decidedly," Lady Allondale replied, and she resolved on the spot that the Bishop should do more than that for her.

"As to Mr Brown," Mrs Cornwell went on bitterly, "I have no hesitation in saying to you that he's a disgrace to his cloth;" and, to do her justice, Mrs Cornwell had no hesitation in saying this to any one at any time, it was a dainty dish which she never omitted an opportunity of serving up.

"Brown! why, I hear great things of Brown," Lord Allondale said; "I forget who told me or what they are exactly, but he's going to be a man of mark."

"Is he? ah!" Mrs Cornwell said with a derisive ejaculatory guttural sound that resembled a snort; "a man of mark indeed! the only mark that will be on him will be the mark of the beast."

"Is he a sanctified young clergyman with a straight coat down to his feet and his hair cropped close?" Lady Allondale asked; "I have known two or three of that sort, and they were such bores."

"No! Brown's a very good-looking fellow. Jove! can't he ride too? goes as straight as any man I ever saw," Lord Allondale replied. No wonder Lady Allondale thought that it would be a pity to allow Mrs Donne to monopolize all the attentions of such a man! "I wish there was another ball at St Odulph's, dear!" she said suavely to her husband, "and

then *you* might dance with Mrs Donne, and I would take the Bishop, and that admirable Crichton his Chaplain," and by the tone of her voice as she said it, Lord Allondale knew that Fanny had not forgotten those unlucky incidents at Donne Place, though she had never mentioned them since their marriage. Lord Allondale would have given much to have been able to eradicate every spark of jealousy, every atom of doubt from his wife's breast. The fear that he might be long in doing so was the sole shadow that fell across this felicitous portion of his career. "I wish she'd speak out about it," he thought, fretfully, "and then I should be better able to tell her that there really never was anything between Dora and myself." But it was not Lady Allondale's game to "speak out about it."

"I suppose they will send the hearse for you, won't they?" Lord Allondale asked his aunt when it grew late, and she

evinced a certain uneasiness, to the cause of which he had no clue. He always called the Rectory carriage, which, it must be confessed, was ungainly in build and funereal in appearance, generally "the hearse," and Mrs Cornwell would smile faintly at the feeble joke, flowing as it did from the fountain-head of her own baronial house. But though she smiled, she did not like it.

Now this night Lord Allondale's wit was harder to endure than usual, for she had counted on being sent home in one of the Fleetwold carriages, and had refused to hear of her own screws being taken out of their stable that night. So the smile with which she answered, "No, she didn't think it would be sent," was but the ghost of one, and Lady Allondale immediately divined the cause of its weakness.

"I'm sorry that we should have kept you so late, Mrs Cornwell, but one of the servants shall walk home with you," she

said, before Lord Allondale could offer a carriage or a remark ; and Mrs Cornwell, though she was tired and choking with indignation, saw that there was nothing before her but the two-mile walk to the Rectory.

“It wouldn’t be well to make her means of coming and going too agreeable to Aunt Selina, or I shall be having more of her society than I desire or deserve, whatever my faults may be,” Lady Allondale thought to herself. Now though it was perhaps scarcely charitable to suffer Mrs Cornwell to tramp home that cold December night, still self-preservation is the first law of nature, and these insidious social evils, if not put down with a strong hand at once, are apt to become oppressive. Lady Allondale was not an ill-natured woman, but she could not help remembering that Fleet Rectory and Fleetwold were very near !

But Mrs Cornwell was determined that



no thin-skinnedness on her part should mar that perfect harmony which she was anxious should exist between the park and the parsonage.

“Good night, my dear,” she said, kissing Lady Allondale when she was going away. “I shall send the girls up directly after breakfast to-morrow, and then they will show you all that’s worth seeing about the place; we all know it so well; we were all born here, you know.”

“Yes, I suppose you know it well, and I’ve no doubt I shall learn it in time,” Lady Allondale replied. Then as soon as Mrs Cornwell was well away under the careful convoying of a footman, who detested her, Lord Allondale put his arm round his wife’s waist, and took her hand, and said, following up her parting speech to Mrs Cornwell, “And like it too, Fanny, for my sake.”

“Yes, very much,” she said, holding her cheek down to him to kiss.

“I shall show you the picture gallery to-morrow myself, Fanny; there are some very good ones, Vandycks and Lelys. You’ll find all the women run like Stephanie Fordyce, she’s a regular Crespigny.”

“You must not expect me to go into the regulation ecstasies, Willie! I never can over those beady-eyed, fleshy women with small thick mouths that Lely painted. I abominate them; they all look to me like ‘black-eyed Susans,’ very much undressed.”

“Ah, but they’re quite the thing,—I mean it’s quite the thing to have one’s ancestors painted by Vandyck and Lely; all the cavalier families have. The only Crespigny that wasn’t true to the cause, by Jove! went mad, or religious, or something of that sort, and made a lot of prayers. Aunt Ellen has them bound up in a big book, and reads out yards of them whenever she’s savage. We have him up in

the gallery with his face turned to the wall."

He stopped, for there was in the expressive face of the lady whom he was addressing not the shadow of an interest in what he was saying, and though Lord Allondale was not gifted with the keenest intelligence or the finest susceptibility, he was sensible enough and sensitive enough for this, to reserve his words when palpable evidence was given him [that they were falling upon careless ears.

But though she had been unconscious of their sense, she marked the cessation of their sound, and so when he came to his abrupt pause she looked up, and smiled with her lips (her eyes were less manageable), and said,

"Yes? you were saying—?"

"I don't believe you heard a word I was saying, Fanny," he interrupted, in a hurt tone. Lady Allondale was a very wise woman, and not at all disposed to

vex or annoy the man she had married when such vexation or annoyance could be avoided at the cost of a trifling effort on her part. So now when he let her perceive that her lack of attention to what he had been saying was rankling in his mighty mind, she made her manner frankly apologetic, and thought of a story on the spot.

“Well, Willie, to be candid, I did not hear, for I was thinking of Mrs Cornwell, pitying her for the walk she has brought upon herself to-night, and hoping that it would convey to her mind the lesson I intended when I stopped your offer of the carriage.”

“Poor Aunt Selina, I ought to have sent her home, not that I wanted her here to-night.”

“Nor did I, nor shall I any other night, Willie. She evidently thinks that she is to have the freedom of this house as she had in your father’s time, and I’m resolved

that she shall have nothing of the kind. It's a duty we owe to our neighbours to prevent them making themselves obnoxious as much as possible, and I'll do my best to save Aunt Selina from making herself obnoxious at Fleetwold."

She said all this in a bright laughing tone, that robbed it of even the semblance of ill-nature, and she said it in a way that amused her husband, and succeeded in distracting his attention utterly from that look of indifference to his eloquence which had arrested the flow of the latter. But though she said it thus, she was revolving very earnestly in her mind the while how she should make known to Lord Allondale a plan she had formed for the extension of his hospitality to a friend of her own, Mr Goubaud.

In addition to this doubt respecting the deft introduction of Mr Goubaud, Lady Allondale had another source of disquiet; a very womanly, a very human source of

disquiet! and it was this. Did Dora Donne, the woman whom for divers reasons she disliked more than any one else in the world, live at too great a distance from Fleetwold to be rendered envious and unhappy by the glory and grandeur of the mistress of it?

Lady Allondale would not on any account have worded this disquieting doubt, and put it to herself. We are all subjected to the prickings of equally ignoble ones, but we keep them out of sight, and pretend they are contemptible trifles and don't worry us, which they do awfully; but it was a judiciously prepared blister-plaster to her mind, this thought that possibly, though in the same county, Mrs Donne might not revolve in the Fleetwold orbit, and so be "out of distance" of being made jealous and uncomfortable. It would not content her that Dora should hear of her victories and triumphs. Dora must see them also and smart at the sight, and "see

her Bishop and his Chaplain and all the best-prized ones of her gang come over to my side, or I shall have married this inane little man for nothing," she said to herself. Still as she said it, Lord Allondale went on prosing about his Lelys and Vandycks, and what fine fellows they (the Crespignys) had been in days gone by, till Fanny felt that she should grow common-place and foolish if shut up with him alone too long. "I lose half my tone when he plays upon my mind," she thought; "Mr Goubaud will brighten me up again, and so do Willie good service." Then she relapsed into meditation again, and fell to marvelling how she could most efficaciously be the friend she had freshly promised to be to Gustave Goubaud.

## CHAPTER X.

## MRS DONNE'S AND MR BROWN'S SUCCESSES.

MR BROWN had been in the full enjoyment of all the glory and greatness accruing unto the position of the Bishop's Chaplain for some weeks, when the doubts registered in the last chapter assailed Lady Allondale's mind. During those few weeks indefatigable Mrs Donne had made great head-way towards a notorious intimacy with him.

Now one must have lived in the atmosphere of a cathedral town to fully understand the dignity and importance of the dignitaries of it. Religiously, they may have the merest shadow of an influence over the worldly around ; but socially they



have an influence that is readily acknowledged, for friendly intercourse with them is held to prove freedom from all spot and blemish on the visited one's respectability. This was a great truth that Mrs Donne had early taken to her heart, and now that the time for testing it fully had come, without boring herself she tried to test it fully, paid all homage to the Church, and cultivated Mr Sydney Brown with the most flattering zeal.

For though he was not a "dignitary of the Church," he was the most intimate personal friend of the Bishop, the highest of them all! He was not the rose, but he was the vase in which the odours of the reigning theological opinions at St Odulph's were distilled before being given forth to the public, and Mrs Donne's femininely prophetic soul told her that the chances were considerably in favour of his being a greater man in days to come than even his great leader. For a mighty question had

lately been mooted, and the Chaplain had out-heroded Herod to the extent of causing orthodoxy to shudder at his name and pray for stronger locks to be made legal, whereby the secular mind might be kept securely in its proper place. Now Mrs Donne, not being of the timorous order of female, had great joy in the publicly avowed friendship of a man capable of causing orthodoxy to shudder and himself to be talked about as a "light" though a dangerous one. What the question was Dora neither knew nor cared to know. It might be that doubts had been thrown on the authenticity of the name of the second king of Judah's third son—or on the genuineness of David's remorse and repentance when things went badly with him—or on a serpent having literally called Eve's attention to an apple, or something equally important. Whatever it was, it raised a hot discussion, and no one in this discussion bore his part more brightly and bravely than the late curate

of Fleet. Besides this, Dora liked new views, whether she could understand them or not, and Mr Brown's views were new to her, and the name that was affixed to them as a sort of stigma by the startled Dean and Chapter and orthodox reviews appealed to a woman in whose character there was a strong dash of practicality.

Besides, he was no dull old 'savan, caring only for the dull and learned thing in hand and content to shut himself up for the further contemplation and development of it in solitude. He was not one to hide himself behind his cause and give all the glory to it, and be himself passed over in silence. He came to the fore and led on these little bands of trifles to that mastery over men's minds which he was desirous to gain. The things themselves were sometimes, he deemed, of very small moment. But if they were to have importance at all, they should have it in a way that seemed good to him.

Frankly now he began to tell himself that Connie Cornwell, though he had loved her for her pretty face and gentle ways and blushing affection for himself, would have been no fitting wife for him. She might even, he thought, remembering the school in which she had been brought up, have essayed to hold him back! His triumphs would have been a source of trembling to her, for Connie's was essentially one of those natures that deemed it well to "let things that do very well already alone." Naturally he did not want to have his hours of social relaxation impregnated with doubts that he could not desire to dissolve, and fears that he might be incapable of dissipating. No, she would have been no fitting wife for him; the woman he married, if she could not share them with understanding, must at least blindly dare and triumphantly exult in the danger and success which would infallibly accrue upon the complete unfolding of those views.

But, in the mean time, until he had a wife, Dora Donne was ready to so dare and triumph and exult and sympathize with him. The chain of liking for her, the first link of which she had forged in telling him that when he was a dean he must not forget that she had been the first to congratulate him on clearing himself from the ruck, lengthened. He was not likely to forget it; ambitious men never do forget the voice that "calls upon," and the hand that judiciously lifts them to the first great leap in life. Added to this natural tenacity of memory, Mrs Donne was perpetually prognosticating great things for him. She declared the conviction to have been evolved out of her own internal consciousness; but the truth was that she collected opinions about him from all sides, and finding that the majority whom he had caused to open their eyes so widely that they could not shut them again,

deemed him "bad and dangerous to know," Mrs Donne knew that her prognostications might be safely made, and would assuredly be realized.

Donne Place was situated at a distance of fifteen miles from Fleetwold; not an easy calling distance, perhaps, but one which presents very easily surmounted difficulties when people are desirous of being friendly in the country. But though the difficulties were so easily surmounted, and though Dora had stated to Stephanie Fordyce that Lady Allondale "was a charming woman," and that she, Dora, was "so fond of her," she suavely expressed her determination not to call at Fleetwold. Expressed it suavely but with considerable decision, and pretended to her husband that her reason for doing so was a fear she had—a "foolish fear, no doubt"—that Lady Allondale would regain a portion of her old ascendancy over his mind.

"My dear Dora! impossible you could ever have been jealous of her," he said; and she replied,

"Yes, I was, Lyster, dreadfully; and I might be silly enough to be so again, and it makes me doubly miserable, for I know I have no right to be."

Which was all very gratifying and flattering to Mr Donne, who thought himself a finer fellow than ever, and reminded himself the next instant of how Fanny *had* seemed touched, by Jove! when she said she should take the graft of the white rose away with her in memory of him.

Of course it will not be supposed for an instant that the reason Dora assigned for non-intercourse was the real and true one that actuated her. Had it been, Mrs Donne would not have assigned it. It was a much more subtle one—one that was too delicately spiteful to be entrusted to her husband. Mrs Donne knew that something would be wanting to Lady Allondale's com-

plete beatitude, while she imagined that her late mistress and rival was too busily and happily employed to have time or inclination to witness it. It was a true feminine instinct that taught her this. There is far more bliss in displaying our glory and grandeur to those who knew us when we lacked these things, and essayed, may be, to look down upon us, than in airing them before the stranger who cannot be oppressed with mortification at our rise. This may be unamiable, but it is true, and truth is better than amiability. So though she longed to see how Fanny deported herself in her new estate, Mrs Donne refrained from taking steps towards witnessing it, and rightly judged that her abstinence would be a source of disquiet to Lady Allondale.

Mr Brown lapsed into habits of great intimacy with the Donnes, in absolute unconsciousness of what would be said of him by the righteous in consequence of such



habits of intimacy. He was as friendly disposed towards the husband as towards the wife; and the husband was to the full as friendly disposed towards him, and as anxious to see such habits perpetuated. But though he was as friendly disposed towards Mr Donne, Mr Donne did not interest him to the same extent as Dora. Had he given much thought to the subject, he would have acknowledged that Mr Donne alone would have been utterly powerless to call him out two or three times a week from St Odulph's to Donne Place.

But though he went there in all blamelessness in the spirit as well as in the letter, he got very hard measure dealt out to him for going there at all. Mrs Donne had dared and defied St Odulph's and the neighbourhood in numerous small and unimportant things, and they had striven to depress her with their disapproval, and instead of being depressed, Mrs Donne had put both the Bishop and his Chaplain into

her triumphal car, and driven over her detractors' necks. So propriety was wroth with her, and after the manner of propriety said a great deal more than it had any foundation for saying, and utterly disregarded the declaration of that thorough gentleman, St Paul, who reprimands evil speaking in his usually well-bred manner, in the following words:

“Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest; for wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself: for thou that judgest doest the same things.”

Now Mrs Donne did not quote St Paul at them, but she very broadly asserted that “the women who abused and deprecated her line of conduct would have been only too happy to pursue it themselves had wit been given them sufficient to lure any man to their houses.” This broad statement of her candid opinion respecting them did not strengthen the weak regard already

entertained for Dora by the ladies whose lamps she put out.

“The poor, stupid, dull creatures,” she would say, when one of those delightful beings gifted with the grace of speaking their minds, and telling their friends what other people say about them, would be repeating current reports to Dora. “The poor, stupid, dull creatures, they hate me because I can accomplish things that they have a dull glimmering notion are amusing even if they’re wrong! and what harm is there, pray, in my husband’s friends coming to his house, I should like to know? Pooh! half the respectable old fogies in the county would only be too thankful if their women-kind had the knack of rendering their houses something besides the odious dull holes they are at present. If you really think I’m wrong in being so intimate with Mr Brown, tell my husband so, or let your husband tell Mr Donne so, and then you’ll be thanked accordingly.”

The brave repeaters of current reports knew that they would be thanked accordingly, and felt pleasant things towards pretty Dora for urging them to take a course upon which they lacked the courage to proceed.

In truth, their accusations were groundless enough in this instance. But they shook their heads so vigorously over "what they thought," that Mr Brown caught a breath of the breeze they were getting up at last, and hardly knew what it behoved him to do. To cease from intercourse with pleasant people because unpleasant people were censorious was a thing he was far too sensible a man to contemplate doing on his own account. But then there were the lady's feelings and her husband's to be consulted, and he did not know how best to consult them.

While he was still doubtful and uncertain how to deport himself, the period for the Triennial Festival came on, and St

Odulph's and all within its gates were very busy.

The festival was a very right and proper occasion of gaiety for episcopal patronage. The late Bishop had always graced and blessed the Oratorio with his presence ; had in days gone by bestowed a sort of benedictional attention on Sontag and poor Kate Hayes, and generally identified himself with the musical interests of the town in the usual way. But of late years he had been enfeebled both in body and mind, and the oratorios and miscellaneous concerts had been wanting in the life his former lively identification of himself with them had imparted.

And now great things were expected of the new Bishop. He who had gone to a ball, and devoted himself when there exclusively to brilliant Mrs Donne, might surely at the very least give *one* concert at the palace ! It would be a very legitimate opportunity for him to extend his hospital-

ity to the ladies of St Odulph's, none of whom had crossed the revered palatial threshold since he had come to reign over them spiritually.

Mrs Bardolph, the Dean's wife, was the adventurous one who broached the subject to him.

"It would be a delightful way of bringing people together and promoting harmony in the diocese," she said. He replied that he should be delighted to promote harmony in any such way, only wouldn't the preliminaries be rather terrible?

"They would all arrange themselves, Bishop, your decision made, and the invitations sent out, and a lady found to preside on the occasion! Why, there would be nothing else to do, you know."

"No, to be sure not," he said; "only there's the difficulty, to send out the invitations and find the lady."

"Oh the lady would be found readily

enough," Mrs Bardolph said, smiling in a way that ought to have told him that the one was before him now. Mrs Bardolph was a "magnificent woman in velvet," her friends said, and she felt herself to be peculiarly well fitted to dispense palatial hospitality. But the Bishop was blind, and did not put the affair into her hands with a request that she would preside.

But still he took very kindly indeed to the idea of a concert at the palace for the promotion of harmony in the diocese, and promised to carry it out. So Mrs Bardolph was fain to be content with the success of her mission as far as it had gone, and to hope that the scales might fall from his eyes, and he be brought to perceive that she was the one best fitted by nature and circumstances to make the honours of his house to the Bishop's guests.

The Bishop was, as has been said before, a man who if not precisely 'of' had at least been very much in the world. He

understood society, and he knew perfectly well the sort of supervisor society wanted when it was collected in a room to listen to the voices of singing men and singing women, and to marches, and fantazias, and portions of oratorios.

The Bishop very rarely talked 'Bishop,' never when he was alone with his Chaplain. When he had told Mr Brown of the plan that had been mooted by Mrs Bardolph, he said,

"Mrs Bardolph evidently wanted me to ask her to receive my guests. She wouldn't do it according to my views, though, and I don't know any one else here who would."

"No," Sydney Brown said, "Mrs Bardolph would mark the gradations of rank in the Church, and measure out her civilities to men's wives accordingly. She would mean well, but she couldn't help it, and that wouldn't do."

"Then I don't see how it's to be done at all, unless Mrs Donne would oblige me



by coming over and taking it on her own head ; she's a thorough-paced woman of the world, and that's what's wanted on such an occasion."

Sydney Brown said he thought it "would be an excellent plan ;" and then his face flushed as he reflected how this honour paid to her would most surely add to—if not set a-light—the pile of scandal already built up about the fascinating Dora. But still he did not care to say anything to the Bishop about it.

He was right ! St Odulph's was beside itself with rage when it heard that Mrs Donne was to regulate the invitations and receive the invited. Whoever had been promoted to the coveted post of hostess that night would have been regarded with green eyes by her compeers ; even Mrs Bardolph herself would not have ascended the throne without a dissentient voice. But Mrs Donne ! a usurper like Mrs Donne to come in and be gracious

and merciful to them ! It was too much ; virtue gnashed its teeth at this sight of wickedness flourishing like a green bay tree.

And Mrs Donne ! how Mrs Donne revelled in their discomfiture, and what a lovely dress she caused to be created to still further discomfit them. Mr and Mrs Donne accepted the invitation and the compliment in a note, over which the spirit of sober, calm satisfaction and nothing more hung. But despite the epistolary sober calm, Mrs Donne was wild with delight and gratified ambition.

Soon Lady Allondale heard of it, but what Lady Allondale thought and felt must not be told yet. Then Connie Cornwell heard of it, and remembered her pangs at the ball, and that Sydney Brown was living in the palace, and she almost wondered she did not experience more than a brief spasm of jealousy.

More than half the invited were ready

to cry "Give me to drink Mandragora—that I may sleep out this great gap of time, during which Mrs Donne desecrates the palace." But no one gave them to drink Mandragora, and they were not independent-minded enough to refuse the invitation, though the accepting of it involved a species of homage to Mrs Donne from which their souls revolted.

It is hard to say exactly why even those who knew her not, hated this woman with such a wealth of hatred. I am inclined to think that it was owing in a great measure to her not caring one whit whether they liked her or not. This carelessness of their regard, together with her beauty and grace, and her surface popularity with men, utterly routed Christian charity from the breasts of her sister-women when they discussed her. Don't we all know some such woman as this? some one whom all the rest of the women we know "have no patience with." Directly a woman, no

matter how faultless her conduct, evinces a profound disregard for the love and liking of her own sex, they are pitiless to her. She may not do them any harm—she may pursue the even tenor of her way unconscious of their existence, but they double-thong her on every occasion and view her with dislike and suspicion. Beauty, grace, talent, they may forgive! But carelessness as to their opinion! no, never.

Now, there were some women in the world who had just cause for cherishing no very kindly feeling towards Mrs Donne. Sundry wives whose husbands found them dull, tame, and vapid after a brief experience of the fascinating Dora's skill in saying things that sounded well (she had studied the science of acoustics),—Connie Cornwell, Lady Allondale (whose weaknesses were known to Dora), and one or two others who shall be nameless. But these, if they did not precisely forgive her her trespasses towards them, regarded

them with a far greater spirit of toleration than did the many towards whom she was guileless. Her most ruthless enemies were in the ranks of those whom she never had rivalled, and never would rival—because they were powerless to attract the attention of any man towards whom it was possible clever, proud Dora could incline.

And perhaps this very reason of which the many had a faint idea made them hate her the more.

At any rate they did hate her with a virulence that would rob that approaching concert of all its sweetness, and make it a source of vanity and vexation of spirit for some time to come. Mrs Bardolph's notion that it would tend to the promotion of harmony in the diocese was proved futile immediately it became known that Mrs Donne was going to preside, and make welcome in the Bishop's house the Bishop's splenetic guests.

A great many happy households were rent and torn asunder when the fell sound first made itself heard. Husbands and fathers said to wives and daughters, that if it would be so offensive to them to go, they had better remain away; as if such a thing could be contemplated for an instant! "No, Mr Cornwell," Aunt Selina said, when the Rector of Fleet made this mean suggestion, "*I* never shrink from the performance of a duty, however painful that duty may be." Miss Connie said, that "though it would be painful of course if Mr Brown made himself conspicuous with Mrs Donne, still she (Connie) would risk it, since it promised to be such a very nice concert." This she said in a note to Stephanie Fordyce, who handed it to her brother, who forthwith remarked that he didn't think Connie ever cared for Brown.

The end of it was, that all the invitations were accepted. They soothed them-

selves by denouncing the affair as "scandalous," not in relation to the Bishop! oh! no; they remembered that he had power, and held their daggers as far as he was concerned; but in relation to Sydney Brown, "who had, no doubt," they said, "beguiled the dear Bishop into this error of judgment." Sydney Brown soon heard these denunciations,—some one is always found to tell the besprinkled one that mud is being thrown at him; and Sydney Brown began to feel that it would be well to think about coming to some decision with regard to a gradual cessation of the great intimacy that had sprung up between himself and the Donnes. "These things should never be dropped suddenly," he told himself, and then he rode out to Donne Place, and Dora sang to him while he played chess with her husband. He heartily wished that it was as easy for him to prove those who babbled about her, wrong, as it was to prove that same of sundry things that had

been well received and believed in for centuries.

Lady Allondale would have the pleasure of showing how well her new state became her at last, for the Allondales were too mighty in the land for a question to be raised as to whether they should be asked or not. Their names were second on the list, the Lord-Lieutenant of the county first, and then Lord and Lady Allondale, and "Willie will be foolish enough to come and bring her, though of course seeing *me* under such altered circumstances will only make him unhappy," Dora said to herself with a little burst of vanity. She little knew that Lord Allondale had gone into the bondage and slavery of an inordinate and devoted attachment to a wife who did not reciprocate it.

This concert created difficulties and heart-burnings in divers quarters. Stephanie Fordyce was asked to it by her future step-mamma, in a deliciously flat-



tering little note that it was extremely difficult to answer in the negative, and Stephanie, had she been left to the exercise of her own free will, would have had no desire to answer it in the negative. But Stephanie was not left to the exercise of her own free will in the matter. Captain Denis Donne opposed it at first with a mute opposition that was more aggravating than any words could have been. Then when after repeated remarks on her part to the effect that "she didn't see why she shouldn't go," and "did he see why she shouldn't go?" and "wouldn't it be rather nice?" he said,

"I wouldn't influence your decision for the world, Stephanie, but I don't like you to go under Mrs Donne's auspices; I had much rather you did not go. Still if you want to go I shall not say a word against it; don't say I prevented it."

Which was pleasant and reasonable on the part of Captain Denis Donne.

"Her letter is so very kind," Stephanie said, "I must think of some very good reason for refusing to go."

"Oh! go if you like."

"Now, Denis, how could I, after what you have said? Don't think I care, dear," she added hastily, and, in truth, she did not care to do anything that was in any way displeasing to this lord of her life, "but you can't wonder at my wishing to give a nice polite reason for not accepting such a nice, kind, polite invitation?"

"That's just what I had much rather you did not give; if you do, she'll be obviating it, and asking you again. Never give a reason, Steph, particularly to Dora! Just tell her you won't go, and have done with it."

"But, Denis, I can't be so ill-bred," Stephanie pleaded earnestly. Lady Allondale in such a case would have tossed him the note, and told him to answer it himself if she were not left free to do it

in her own way ; and as Captain Donne was getting rather into a habit of command, perhaps such a course of treatment might have done him good. But Stephanie liked to think him right, and to act accordingly while she could, and so she refused to go to the concert in a letter the terms of which were not so entirely satisfactory to herself as they were to Captain Donne.

But Mrs Donne was delighted with her for refusing, for Mrs Donne would have been hampered by her considerably. There was no saying,—Stephanie might be one of those young ladies who adhere to their chaperones, and if so, Stephanie would have been very much in her way at a place like a concert. On more than one occasion Mr Brown had spoken admiringly of Stephanie, had spoken of her not only admiringly, but as if he would very much like to see her again ! Now though Dora was not guilty of the injustice to her own appearance of thinking Stephanie's to be

compared with it, still she did not wish on the occasion of a great public triumph such as she meant this concert to be, for one of her satellites to revolve for an instant around another luminary than herself. The chances were greatly in favour of the Bishop being very attentive to her; as a gentleman under the circumstances it behoved him to be so, but she secured Mr Brown by a *coup*. "It will be a nervous position for me," she said; "Mr Brown, you must promise that you won't stir from my side without leave. Lyster will depend upon you, for of course he will be obliged to attend to others." And Mr Brown promised.

## CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH DOUBT ASSAILS THE MINDS OF MANY.

It has been stated in a recent chapter that Lady Allondale was afflicted with doubts as to the best means to be adopted for the carrying out of that offer of friendship which she had since her elevation made to the young Frenchman, Gustave Goubaud.

It has been shown how she met him for a moment in Regent Street, and how even in that moment he gave her to see that the old laughing gallantry had fled and something more serious arisen in its place. And she! she was a woman who always meant to do her duty in that state of life to which her own wit had raised

her. But for all that, she was touched by the sight of the change in Goubaud, so touched that had she not felt herself through her marriage vow to be founded on a rock, she would not have risked further communion with him.

But she did feel herself to be founded on a rock, and she did feel, moreover, that unless her mind was occasionally brightened by free unfettered intercourse with something superior to the very small and weak one of Lord Allondale, that she would in time illustrate the truth of Tennyson's lines that "As the husband is the wife is." Lord Allondale had been horribly wearisome to her on their wedding tour. He had bored her, afflicted her with the weight of inexpressible tedium in Paris even. Though she had then suppressed all sign of such weariness and tedium, she had done it with an effort that could not be constantly sustained. She meant well towards this man whom she had married at

this juncture. She meant thoroughly well, and honestly desired to spare him the pain it would naturally enough cause him did she some day lash out through being over-trying and let him know what a nuisance she thought him. It was not mere sophistry which induced her to say as she did that intercourse with Goubaud "would invigorate her and so do good service to Willie." It was a means of doing them good service from which most men would have desired their wives to refrain; better a possible tedium in their than a too vivid pleasure in another man's society. But Lord Alondale was not like most other men. He was in love with and afraid of his wife, and desperately ashamed of his own antecedents, the very ones with which she was best acquainted. He distrusted his own powers—not to win her love ultimately—he had some fallacious dream of doing that, but of amusing her in the interim. So when she told him that she thought it

would be very pleasant to ask Mr Goubaud, an old friend of hers, a brilliant feuilleton writer, before whose light Edmund About, Esquiros, and others of that ilk, would eventually pale, down to Fleetwold, he assented at once, and tried to think that he assented willingly.

They were still in London. It was during that December week when she asked for and obtained her husband's permission, and the Frenchman was made happy by the receipt of the result—an invitation—that same night. Lady Allondale's note was unexceptionable. "They had been friends for long," she wrote, "and now her husband would be his friend also." In fact, as she put it, the bond of three was to be one of those hallowed fellowships that frequently break down in real life—a trinity with a weak place in it—a union in which was no strength—a pure and platonic friendship. Mr Gustave Goubaud accepted the invitation to the country-seat



of the British nobleman without further hesitation than was caused by the reflection that should over-ruling influences urge him in an unlucky hour on to the back of one of the British nobleman's horses, he would show to a disadvantage.

That over-ruling influences would elevate but to hurl him down he did not doubt for an instant. For the credit of his nation he was resolved to risk his neck and ride, if his riding were made a point of by his entertainers. Even as he made this resolve, he pictured himself on a rampant steed of an order like unto that one which had bounded over the bars in Rotten Row, and as he thought of that horse's fate, he wished that the rider had shared it.

There was no mechanical horse in those days in Piccadilly upon which, under the auspices of a brace of young Belgians, he could have taken cruelly violent exercise, and deluded himself into the idea that he

was learning to ride. That admirably constructed animal was then making the tour of his mighty inventor's land, employed in securing to the men of the same those matchless 'seats' and 'hands' which Germans are famed for possessing. The brilliant joke had not been perpetrated then of essaying to teach Englishmen to ride upon a rocking-horse. Therefore Mr Goubaud went to a livery stable, and for the space of one hour performed in the riding-school upon the back of a well-intentioned, reliable mare, who sagaciously declined to entrust such a delicate matter as the management of her mouth into his keeping, and through whose good sense he consequently made the round of the school many times with perfect safety and entire satisfaction.

But something whispered to the aspirant for honours in what upon his instructor's card of prices was called the noble art of equitation, that should Lord

Allondale design to jeopardize his (Gombaund's) neck, it would be over ground that materially differed from this place that was so specially adapted for easy falling. He had seen the end of a run with a pack of beagles once, and as he recalled the sight to his mind now, artistically he was gratified, for the beagles had swept along after the manner of their kind, in an unbroken wave, and after them over everything, bah! he shuddered, had streamed the hunt. It had gone over a ditch, over a deep wide ditch with a drop beyond it that must, he thought, have stultified the feet of the horses and the faculties of their riders. And over a hedge in which more than one horse got staked and more than one rider pitched forward on his head. Artistically speaking, it had been a splendid sight, that streaming band of dogs and men in pink. But looked at from the point of view of a man who might for "his honour in her eyes" have to brave

similar dangers, it was an ugly spectacle.

No stigma is cast on the courage of the man whom these doubts assailed. But he was no fool,—he did not expect to be able to manage a horse by inspiration, and until this morning he had never been upon the back of one before. He did not lack courage; with the greatest pleasure and most admirable promptitude he would have offered to run or be run through by, to put a bullet into the man or risk the man's putting a bullet through him, had one been found rash enough to assert that he did lack courage. But he did lack that blind belief which induces some people to think they can do that in maturity without instruction which they never learnt to do in youth. He did not lack courage, but he felt sure that did fate and Lady Allondale conspire in urging him on to an exhibition of himself on horseback, that he should come to woeful grief.

I have said that Lady Allondale meant well by her husband at this juncture ; and any one who reads these pages with the idea that in time Lady Allondale will act ill by her husband, will be disappointed. The way is not being paved towards the lover's triumph and the lady's downfall. His love for her, and her wearied yearning for the brightness his companionship brought into her life, is not to end in an elopement. A better woman might have fallen, but when this story ends it will be seen that Lady Allondale is still in a position to sit in the seat of the scornful about the better woman.

At this juncture the unscrupulous *intrigante* meant very well towards the man by whom she had attained unto all that seemed good to her in life. True, the position had some drawbacks, but what were they compared to those which had oppressed her in former days? The vicinity of the Cornwells was a trial, for

Mrs Cornwell was so well disposed towards her nephew's beautiful wife, that she strove to associate Lady Allondale with herself in all her good works. And association in Mrs Cornwell's good works involved an immense amount of mental and bodily fatigue. She bore Lady Allondale in triumph to look at the schools, she entreated Lady Allondale not to exercise indiscriminate charity in the village, but to make herself acquainted with the relative degrees of worth of those who were sick, sorry, or sorely put to in any way. Now as Lady Allondale exercised charity principally on the broad and natural ground of wishing to rid herself of importunities, such entreaties were disregarded frequently; and then Mrs Cornwell wailed over the degeneracy of the judgment of the reigning Lady Bountiful. By way of a small excitement, Mrs Cornwell had organized prayer-meetings and Dorcas gatherings, an olla-podrida of prayer and bun, and scandal and flannel

list,—and these she besought Lady Allondale to attend, on the plea that it wouldn't look well to the neighbourhood if she remained away; and these Lady Allondale very resolutely refused to attend even so seldom as once a month, greatly to the delight of the Misses Cornwell, to whose hearts these good works of their mamma's were far from dear, and who consequently gladly registered any vote against them.

There were a good many guests assembled at Fleetwold when Mr Goubaud arrived there the last week in December. Lady Allondale's first list of the people who were to be there together had been a judiciously arranged one. The only ones who had failed her were Stephanie and Captain Donne. Denis meant to go down to Fleetwold to a steeple-chase—all gentlemen riders — that was to come off in January, but he said that "though he would not interfere with her wishes in any

way, he would much rather that Stephanie declined Lady Allondale's invitation."

But every one else whom she had asked had come, and, strange to say, each one admitted that the inviting of all the others had been a sensible and successful thing. Perhaps the success was owing to her strict adherence to a rule she had laid down and to which she always meant religiously to adhere, namely, to have a minority of women. Lady Allondale had an idea that the marring of harmony at festive gatherings for a lengthened period was mainly attributable to a superfluity of her own sex. As Lady Allondale was a clever woman and generally drew her deductions correctly, who shall say that this idea was erroneous?

"Two married women and one girl—I won't have more, Willie," she had said to her husband; "tell me who are the least tedious married women and who's the



nicest girl next to Stephanie, and they shall be asked." Then Lord Allondale thought of Dora immediately, and did not dare to mention her, although his wife had given him such an admirable opportunity.

But though Mrs Donne was forbidden fruit, the matrons of England were very well represented at Fleetwold. The merits of the husbands weighted the choice that fell upon Mrs Orme and Lady Bolton, for a steeple-chase was contemplated, and "Dick Orme," as he was called, was a crack gentleman rider, and Sir Hugh Bolton, though he was not one, desired to be thought so.

The unmarried girl was an orphan niece of Sir Hugh's, a pretty girl, and an heiress, Helen Mowbray by name. But despite her prettiness, her heirship, and her dauntless love of flirtation, Lady Allondale had no fear of Goubaud's allegiance to herself being shaken, for Miss Mowbray

spent nearly all her time in "gentling" some one of Dick Orme's horses "with the complete approbation and full permission," as she took care to tell every one, "of Dick Orme's wife."

Captain Fordyce was there also, and Frank Cornwell, a young barrister, who wished people to think that he wrote for the *Saturday Review*, which he did not. And—but it is useless to swell the list of names, so I will mention but one other, Gustave Goubaud.

While they were all assembled there, the tidings of that concert at the Bishop's palace got wafted abroad, and then the invitation came, and Lady Allondale triumphed in the anticipation of how both Bishop and Chaplain should outrage St Odulph's more for her than they had already done for Mrs Donne, and then a whisper arose that Mrs Donne was to be the queen of the occasion. As soon as this whisper fell upon her ears, Lady

Allondale felt that she could know no peace unless Dora's ewe-lamb, this episcopal radiance, could be shed equally upon her (Lady Allondale).

Now just for a few short hours Gustave was a trouble to her, for his presence distracted her thoughts from the arranging and perfecting of that line of action which might result in her own triumph and Dora's downfall.

The young lady who had known so well how to adapt her angles to those of other people in her anxious unmarried days, was an admirably agreeable hostess. She collected the materials of pleasure for them, and then suffered her guests to find it in their own way. It was not only that she told them there was liberty of action, every one tells his or her guests that; but there was liberty, complete liberty of action, and the party was so arranged that whatever one did it would have been injudicious for the others to talk about it,

which made things safe and pleasant in the house.

But though things were safe and pleasant in the house, a house so conducted might not hope to escape censure long. True, Dick Orme's pretty wife might shut her eyes discreetly to Helen Mowbray's eternal gentling of his horses, and glee in his company, while Charlie Fordyce, whom she had "known in other days" (those avenging "other days"), was there to re-awaken the memory of the same. True, Sir Hugh and Lady Bolton felt themselves trammelled in the links of silence for divers reasons—amongst others, a dread of what their wilful determined niece might finally elect to do, reigned paramount. True, Lord Allondale hoped against hope, and shut his eyes and stopped his ears, and strove to smile when at the entrance of her old friend Mr Goubaud, the beautiful woman whom he (Lord Allondale) had married would wake into a more thrilling anima-

tion, and brighten into a more bewitching beauty. They did these things, those who assembled together in that hospitable mansion; but outsiders were less reserved in the expression of their opinion, and not one of that merry party was spared a merciless mention by those who came to dine and dance and share their pleasures, and then laughed and rode away.

The Misses Cornwell were at Fleetwold a great deal. Connie's bruised wings tried themselves afresh, and once or twice feebly essayed a flight against Mrs Orme in the matter of Charlie Fordyce. Success was nearly hers on one or two occasions, but Mrs Orme brought him back by a deft allusion to those "other days," and he, knowing they could never become heavy, hugged his chains and fancied they were ornamental. So Connie resolved to give up the game until she went to stay with Stephanie in the spring, when she would have a lot of new dresses, and Mrs Orme

wouldn't be there. When once she gave up the game, she turned a more attentive ear to those reports of the old love which were rife in the land. But though she had suffered through him and was infirm of purpose, Connie was endowed with acumen enough to feel that Sydney Brown was more sinned against than sinning.

Now though the Misses Cornwell were eternally at Fleetwold, they said a great deal on the subject of their disapprobation of the prevailing manners and customs. "There was nothing," Boadicea said, "in the bearing of Lady Allondale and Mr Goubaud to one another that anybody could take hold of; but it looked extraordinary, didn't it?" Whenever a woman says a "thing looks extraordinary," and doesn't say what looks extraordinary, and why it looks extraordinary, she does a power of mischief. The airy accusation cannot be grappled with, indeed, it is slightly self-condemnatory to notice it at all.

Gradually—and this was before the day of the concert at the Bishop's Palace arrived—Lady Allondale began to feel that the Cornwells were less pleasant to her than they had been, or rather that they were less desirous of pleasing her. Mrs Cornwell left off pestering her about the schools, and was stiff and sour; the rectoress even essayed to be savagely sarcastic on the subject of the Frenchman once; made hints about Leicester Square, and said how liable people, whose misfortune it had been not to have belonged to the upper ten thousand through all time, were to be taken in by foreigners of a lower class. But this was a phase of attack that Lady Allondale soon defeated.

She did not repulse and rout Mrs Cornwell with her own picked forces; she kept the flower of her army, her own bright wit and contemptuous glances, in store for a more witty enemy should one arise; but she just set Miss Mowbray on Aunt Selina.

“ Make Mrs Cornwell feel what a fool she is when she is trying to make out that Mr Goubaud is a Leicester Square adventurer, Helen,” she said ; “ not that I care, but Aunt Selina is blessed with the local mind, and thinks that all ‘ foreigners ’ and all who have to do with them, are straight from or on their way to Beelzebub. If you do it neatly, I’ll make Lord Allondale get up another steeple-chase if the first goes off well.”

“ Then I’m with you,” Helen Mowbray replied. “ Mr Goubaud may be a muff (I laughed yesterday when Dick Orme wanted him to ride Rory O’More, and he wouldn’t); but he’s not such a muff as Mrs Cornwell, or her son with his humbug and pretence of being a literary man.” While Miss Mowbray was giving the benefit of the doubt to Goubaud, Lady Allondale gazed composedly out of the window.

Miss Helen Mowbray was as good as her word the next time Mrs Cornwell made



light mention of Mr Goubaud. "There's one unfailing test of a man's being well educated, and accustomed to mix in good society in his own country, Mrs Cornwell," she said, "and that is the way he speaks the language of yours."

"Then your test proves Mr Goubaud wanting," Mrs Cornwell replied, triumphantly.

"Not at all. I beg your pardon, but you're utterly wrong, utterly. He may speak broken English; it's broken into bits, I allow, but it's not vulgar English, it's the English of the upper classes, and his French is the same, it's exquisite. Just you try him," she continued, abruptly. "I'll give you an opportunity as soon as he comes into the room, by opening up some question that I'll tell him you want to follow up; and to facilitate discussion I'll do it in his mother tongue, then you'll find whether he's wanting or not." Long before Miss Helen Mowbray had concluded,

Mrs Cornwell was reduced to abjectly entreating her not to do anything of the kind, since she (Mrs Cornwell) was—well! averse to adventuring upon the dangers of a foreign tongue.

But she said much to her nephew on the subject of Mr Goubaud's prolonged presence in his house. "Is that young man never going away," she would generally preface her remarks with, and Lord Allondale would meekly try to avert what was coming by asking "which young man? there are several here."

"That young Frenchman, your wife's friend, I meant. It's so different the others staying on, but he neither hunts nor shoots, and it looks odd."

"Oh! I don't know. What the devil difference does it make, I should like to know? I can't ask a man down, and then go and tell him that I wonder he came, and I wonder he don't go, as he neither shoots nor hunts."

“ Oh, certainly not ; and it was not for myself I spoke, Willie, but as your father’s sister—however, I say nothing.”

“ Then say it, in God’s name, and have done with it.” Lord Allondale was sorely worried by some of the children of his own brain—the offspring of his aunt’s were too much for him.

“ Oh ! I say nothing,” Mrs Cornwell replied ; “ only it is usual when gentlemen stay three weeks at a country house that there should be some ostensible reason for their staying ; not that it is any business of mine, or that I would interfere in any way, but I am not blind, and I am not such an utterly ignorant woman as Lady Allondale and her pert friend, Miss Mowbary, choose to think me. I have seen a great deal of the world ” (Mrs Cornwell conscientiously believed that she had, because she had lived in it for nearly sixty years), “ and I know that such intimacies are not for nothing, and that Frenchmen

are not to be trusted." Then Mrs Cornwell related an anecdote to the point, showing how an Italian music master (they're all alike she parenthetically observed) had once run away with a young heiress from a boarding-school, and led her a miserable life; "and served her right too," Mrs Cornwell asserted, in a burst of broad Christianity, "he being a foreigner."

In truth, Lord Allondale was very unhappy, not so much about his wife, as about what was thought of her. Now, this is often the case, we may retain full confidence ourselves, but other people's opinions, all worthless though they be, will drive us to the verge of distraction, and doubt of our idol. Mrs Cornwell's, for instance. In his heart, and about a trifle, Lord Allondale would have denounced his aunt's opinions as utterly vain, idle, and unprofitable. But his wife and what was thought of her were no trifles to the enamoured young nobleman. Therefore did

Mrs Cornwell's sketchy doubts and fears assail him on every side, and make him with diabolical ingenuity uncomfortable.

But what could he do? he asked himself as he walked back to Fleetwold after an hour's enjoyment of Aunt Selina's society at the Rectory. He could not—he dared not—tell Fanny what was said about her by the wary who were lying in wait to devour. He could not declare that that was wrong now about his wife which he was prepared to swear had in other days been right about Mrs Donne. Indeed, Fanny's conduct as compared to Dora's was of the snowiest hue. Mrs Donne had committed indiscretions that were crimson by the side of the pale perfect propriety which marked the public bearing to each other of the lady of the house and the young contributor to the *Revue des deux Mondes*. It was a pitiable position to be placed in, and Lord Allondale felt its full

pitiableness invariably after an interview with his aunt.

Not alone was it pitiable by reason of his not-to-be-entirely-quenched distrust of her, but because he loved her so, and would have had her so blameless before the world. She would be the mother of his children in time, he hoped, the mother of his heir, of the future Lord Allondale, and it was hard, cruelly hard, that she should be suspected and not entirely above suspicion! Fifty times he resolved to break through the stern barrier of silence, and tell her what was said and thought, and implore her by his love for her, and for the honour of the name, to give no further room for such sayings and thoughts. Full fifty times his resolution failed him; his blood was very blue, but it failed him in this strait, and he elected, like the basest-born coward, to stand still and suffer things to take their course. The reflection that they had always been a great cavalier

family, that Vandyck and Lely had painted the men and women of his house, and that the fairest daughter of his race had been the mistress of a monarch, was all of no avail. He was hounded back from all assertion of his proper marital authority by the reflection that in other days he too had been faulty and false in the eyes of the woman whose possible fault and falseness he now trembled at.

Truly, to all outward seeming, this thing at which he grieved was so light a grievance in comparison with his own mawkish error of the past at Donne Place. Why, he asked himself now, had he shut himself up in a bower in the damp in order that a lovely woman might undergo the pleasurable sensations of palpitation of the heart outside? Why had he thrown a veil of secrecy over that which there was not the smallest occasion to throw such a veil over? Idle questioning now. Time was, time is, and the present could receive no

help from his past, so he deemed that he had better let the latter alone.

Now the day of the concert came on, and Lord Allondale hoped that the party he had assembled would show signs of dissolution as far as Goubaud was concerned. But Lady Allondale had arranged matters in a way that met the views of her guests if not of her husband. The Boltons were "county people," and were invited of course; the Ormes were "delightful people," welcome everywhere, therefore she should venture to take them. As to the young men, they "shall have the freedom of the cellar, and what more do young men want, Willie?" she asked. Therefore it was settled that the party should not be broken up, and that the Bishop's invitation, though accepted, should not interfere with any prearranged plans.

The concert was on a Friday, and on the Tuesday following the steeple-chase, quite a private thing, was to come off at



Fleetwold. The riders were to be Lord Allondale himself, Dick Orme, Captain For-dyce, Sir Hugh Bolton (who always fell off at the first fence, and did not get into the saddle again for the day), and Frank Cornwall, who "merely did it," he said, "to get some fun out of it for the magazines." They wanted a sixth, and a sixth had not been found, and slurs were freely cast upon the Frenchman (behind his back) because he did not offer for the vacant place.

"I wish in God's name he'd ride and break his neck," Lord Allondale growled to himself, after that last interview with his Aunt Selina; "but it's a kind of thing I can't press upon him, feeling sure of what would happen."

So before the concert came off, Mr Goubaud was spared all entreaties to make the sixth in the Fleetwold steeple-chase.

END OF VOL. II.

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